



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)
and
**JOURNAL OF
PROCEEDINGS**

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Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
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Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
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Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
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Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)
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Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
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O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
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Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
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Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)
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Ruane, Ms Caitríona (South Down)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

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Principal Deputy Speaker	Mr Francie Molloy MLA <i>(from 28 June 2011)</i>
Deputy Speakers.....	Mr Roy Beggs MLA Mr John Dallat MLA Mr Francie Molloy MLA <i>(until 27 June 2011)</i>
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Minister for Regional Development	Mr Danny Kennedy
Minister for Social Development	Mr Nelson McCausland
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.....	Mrs Michelle O'Neill
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.....	Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
Minister of Education.....	Mr John O'Dowd
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Mrs Arlene Foster
Minister of the Environment	Mr Alex Attwood
Minister of Finance and Personnel.....	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Justice	Mr David Ford

Junior Ministers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Ms Martina Anderson
	Mr Jonathan Bell

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 20 June 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Rory McIlroy: US Open Champion

Mr Speaker: Mr Peter Weir has sought leave to make a statement on Rory McIlroy's success at the US Open Championship, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Weir to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call representatives from the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak. Members will know there is no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote, and I will certainly not take any points of order until the matter is dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Weir: Like many Members in the House, I stand here tired but elated. Many spent last night huddled around a television set or a radio listening to the prodigious victory of our native son Rory McIlroy. Above all today, there is a sense of pride — throughout Northern Ireland but particularly in north Down and his native town of Holywood — at his great achievement last night.

As many Members will be aware, Rory McIlroy is not someone who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth or, indeed, a golden putter. He is the product not only of prodigious talent but of the strong support of his parents, who made sacrifices to ensure that he was given the opportunities in life to make the best use of that talent. Their success in bringing him up is shown not only on the golf course but in the wider sporting world, where his down-to-earth attitude marks him out as a true sportsman. His attachment to his roots, his humility in victory and his resilience in defeat — not that many weeks ago we witnessed him face with great dignity his defeat at Augusta — mark him out as a true sports superstar and a tribute to those

who guided him, particularly his parents. It was perhaps fitting that his was a famous Father's Day victory. He has shown a strong mental attitude, combined with natural flair, and has shown himself to be a keen supporter of other local sports. He cheers on the Northern Ireland football team and his is a very regular face at Ravenhill. Indeed, his support for Manchester United makes him about the perfect sports fan, not simply a sportsman.

The magnitude of the success of last night is shown by the fact that what is a very small country of 1.7 million people has provided the last two winners of the US Open, following on the success of Graeme McDowell. Indeed, the scale of the victory — by eight strokes — has been achieved only once or twice in the post-war era. Of 498 major championships, it is in the top 10 in relation to the level of achievement. It is the lowest ever under-par score in the US Open, and, at 22, he is younger than Jack Nicklaus, Severiano Ballesteros or Tiger Woods when they won their first major. I hope that the House will soon celebrate that in a more tangible way with a reception for Rory McIlroy, and I suspect that today's Matter of the Day welcoming his first success at a major will be the first of many. Therefore, I commend it to the House.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I share the sentiments expressed by Mr Weir and offer my congratulations and those of my party to Rory McIlroy on a fantastic achievement. I left Clones football ground yesterday afternoon a very dejected Armagh supporter — *[Interruption.]* It is a temporary relief for some Derry people, but it will not last very long.

The golf last night proved the ability of sport to lift. When you see the human endeavour, the professionalism, the skill and the class of people involved in all sports, it proves the

ability to lift. That is not confined to sports fans; right across the country people were lifted. You can hear, from talking to colleagues and listening to the radio this morning, the huge lift, in particularly difficult economic times, that that victory, on the back of Graeme McDowell's victory last year, has given people right across the area.

It is a great tribute to Rory McIlroy — a humble and grounded young man, when you hear him being interviewed — his parents and the people who have supported him, particularly in the golf club in Holywood. It is a huge achievement, as Mr Weir said, particularly on the back of the Augusta defeat, which many people felt would have a psychological impact on him as a young player. He is clearly made of tougher stuff, and he displayed that last night in the United States.

I join in the congratulations. On the back of McDowell's victory last year and, indeed, Pdraig Harrington's couple of majors, it shows that this small island continues to punch way above its weight not just in golf but in many sports across the world. I heard people speaking this morning about those going to the Special Olympics and about the lift that it had given the golfing team going out there. Right across the land generally, not just people involved in sports, there is huge pride in the achievement of Rory McIlroy and huge optimism for his future and the future of sport generally in this area.

Mr Cree: It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Rory McIlroy on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party on a magnificent achievement. Those of you who followed the game over the past few days will know that it was one of the most exciting and brilliant four days of golf that I have ever seen. There was one particular shot when the ball actually did a tour of the green before finally disappearing down the hole. It was superb golf. He is a young man who deserves this. As Peter Weir said, he comes from a humble family in Holywood.

I heard this morning that Gerry Kelly had interviewed him on UTV many years ago when he was 8, I think he said. At that stage, he was taking golf so seriously that he used to take his golf club to bed with him, with the correct grip as he went to sleep. Maybe that is his secret; maybe there is a lesson there for all of us. Mr Murphy referred to Graeme McDowell, who achieved this last year. For our small population

to do that magnificent job two years running is some achievement.

The noise in Holywood was still going, and we could hear the club's celebrations in Bangor. It is one fantastic achievement. Apart from being a personal triumph, this is a great victory for tourism in Northern Ireland, particularly today, when we have such poor tourism results. He is going to be a great ambassador for sport and tourism, and he deserves our credit.

Mrs McKeivitt: Hearty congratulations to Rory McIlroy, the US Open golf champion of 2011. Rory's success in the US Open at the Congressional Country Club is quite phenomenal. This young man of 22 years from Holywood, County Down — my own county — broke a series of records as he won his first major title with an eight-shot victory. What an achievement.

Rory became the youngest US Open champion since Bobby Jones in 1923 and the youngest golf major winner since Tiger Woods, whoever he is, when he triumphed at the Masters in 1997. Well, we have got our own Tiger; our Celtic Tiger. Someone said that it is dead, but it is not. The worldwide coverage that Rory McIlroy has given to the whole of Northern Ireland and to the tourists who watched all around the world over the weekend proved that he is our star of the County Down. He sold the brand of Northern Ireland so well. It was the way he did it. Yes, it was brilliant golf but in a very modest way. He was spectacular yet calm and showed that he was as gracious in winning as he was when he was losing and being continually reminded about the Masters. Most importantly, he was a very proud son on Father's Day and dedicated the tournament victory to his father. It reminded me of the time when I was a youngster, when Barry McGuigan lifted his world title. It was the same feeling then. The goosebumps are being felt all over the country. I wish Rory all the best. It would be only fitting that you, Mr Speaker, should hold a reception to honour what he has done, or whatever is in order, to show the extreme pride of people here. Well done, Rory.

Mr Lyttle: It gives me, as a former juvenile member of Holywood Golf Club, immense pride to congratulate Rory today. I recall him as a toddler with a half-size set of golf clubs, owning the golf course. It is quite a feat to become US Open champion 2011. His historic sporting feat has, quite simply, united and inspired the whole of Northern Ireland. I was also a juvenile

member of CIYMS sports club in east Belfast, where Rory's dad, Gerry, was a member of staff. Like colleagues, I send special congratulations to Gerry and to Rory's mum, Rosie; to Rory's uncle, Colm; to everyone at Holywood Golf Club; and to all his family and friends. I also want to mention the former Holywood golf professional and Rory's coach, Michael Bannon — from whom I had the pleasure of receiving lessons, admittedly with a different level of success from Rory — former Holywood Golf Club juvenile captain Eddie Harper and former teachers at Sullivan Upper School. I want to congratulate them on the faith and commitment that they invested in Rory and so many other young men and women in recent years.

I am sure that there are more than a few people in Holywood who have asked themselves why a young kid who had barely learned to walk was being allowed on a golf course and why Gerry McIlroy installed a custom-built putting green in his back garden. There are a few who also asked whether Rory could recover from the collapse at the US Masters tournament. However, on the eighteenth green of the Congressional golf course in Maryland last night, we got the answers to all those questions and more. The sacrifice, hard work and belief associated with Rory and his family is an inspiration and a lesson to us all but particularly to any young person, from whatever background, that anything is possible.

The manner of Rory's victory was dignified and truly unique. He broke all manner of records in the process. As has been mentioned, he became the youngest US Open champion since World War II and the youngest winner of a major since Tiger Woods. He posted the best score in the 111-year history of the US Open tournament. The probability of Northern Ireland producing back-to-back winners of the US Open was, as one commentator put it, lottery numbers. No country outside the US had ever won back-to-back US Open titles. Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy have ensured that it was Northern Irish golfers who achieved that. Some people have gone so far as to say that our Celtic Tiger could be as good as one of the most talented sportsmen on the planet: Mr Tiger Woods. I have to disagree. I would argue that he could be even better.

Rory, the whole of Northern Ireland is immensely proud of you. We thank you for promoting our country in all the right ways on a global scale

and for lifting the spirit of everyone in Northern Ireland. Mr Speaker, we congratulate him, and I agree that we have to give him the homecoming that he deserves.

12.15 pm

Mr Allister: It is a pleasure to join in the Assembly-wide congratulations to Rory McIlroy. It certainly was a remarkable achievement. In fact, it does not take very many words to convey the pride that we all feel, because the event itself speaks volumes. To see a young man from our own Province cross the world and attain what he attained — to beat the world's best — fills us all with pride, and he and his family have every right to be extremely proud of their achievement. It is also a measure of the young man that he has been able to cope with the disappointment of defeat as effectively as the great joy of success, and, in that, we see the future of a prolific champion in the years to come. So, I join in congratulating him. For those of us who have never mastered the intricacies of golf, it is a marvel to stand back in amazement and witness the control that he can exercise. One of our morning papers summed it up with the headline "Land of Hope and Rory".

Mr McClarty: I am delighted to add my congratulations to Rory on a magnificent achievement. All the superlatives that can be used have been used to describe his victory last night just outside Washington DC. There are now tourism opportunities for Northern Ireland. Of course, in this area, we cannot promise sunshine, so we have to have events, and golfing is a strong tourist attraction.

Rory's achievement this year and Graeme McDowell's achievement last year — BBC and Sky commentators please note that it is pronounced "McDo'ell", not "McDow-ell" — have set Northern Ireland apart, making it a destination for golfers. If Northern Ireland, with a population of 1.7 million, can produce two US Open champions, there must be something special about Northern Ireland that will attract golfers from across the world to play our links courses. Moreover, it is about time that the British Open returned to Northern Ireland. It was last played here in 1951, so, with the calibre of golfers such as Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy, we should have that competition back again, and there is no reason on this earth why it cannot be played again at Royal Portrush in 2016.

Mr Agnew: On behalf of the Green Party, I am delighted to congratulate Rory McIlroy on what was clearly a tremendous achievement.

Mr Wilson: On the greens. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Agnew: I wish I was quicker. Why did I not think of that? And for it to come from Sammy — I am speechless. To be out-greened by Sammy was not what I expected. *[Laughter.]*

Winning a major golf tournament at the age of 22 is clearly a great accomplishment in itself, but to do so by such a margin and by breaking so many records is remarkable. The world already knew that Rory McIlroy was an incredible golfing talent, but, after his disappointment at Augusta, questions were raised about his temperament. Facing such a major disappointment in full public view must have been difficult to recover from, but to recover and go on to that tremendous victory at one of the most prestigious golf tournaments in the world sets an example to all young people: whatever your personal goal might be, in a sporting career or whatever, you must learn from your disappointments, move on and come back stronger, as Rory clearly did.

It is often assumed of golfers, as, indeed, it is sometimes of politicians, that they come from affluent backgrounds. Mention has been made already of Rory's modest background. He and I have a few things in common. Obviously, we are both residents of north Down. I have just learned from Mr Weir that Rory, like me, is a Man United fan. I did not know that. Also —

Mr McDevitt: You should follow him on Twitter.

Mr Agnew: Well, yes. I also believe that Rory's father once worked as a taxi driver, as my father does. It is important to note that Rory has not come from an affluent background. The road was not paved with money. He is an example of how, with hard work and, clearly, the support that he has received from his family, anything is possible. That applies to anyone who may be deciding their future path.

It is clear that Rory now has the potential to be one of the world's leading golfers for at least the next decade and beyond. However, people will always remember this tournament as the one where he came of age. I second Mr Weir's call that we hold a reception here in Stormont. We cannot let it pass by. Well done, Rory.

Executive Committee Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

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

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 20 June 2011.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take your point of order after I deal with this issue.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 20 June 2011.

Mr Speaker: I will now take your point of order, Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I seek your guidance on how the Assembly, which is the only body to which there is supposedly accountability for Executive actions, can address and discuss the events and process that relate to the disciplining of Mr Paul Priestly, a senior civil servant. That unfolds a remarkable series of events. It strikes me that it would be equally remarkable if the House did not have the opportunity to debate that. I sought this morning to lodge an urgent oral question, but I was advised that it could not be accepted. If that cannot be accepted, how and when does the House address that issue and its important ramifications?

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member is saying in his point of order. He will know that these are all complex issues. However, let me have some thoughts around the issue, and allow me to come back either to the Member directly or to the House. I encourage the Member to maybe go down the road of questions on the particular issue or even a motion to the House. Let me have some thoughts around it, and let me come back to the Member.

Ms Ritchie: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it not be in order for the appropriate Minister, either the Minister of Finance and Personnel or the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to come to the House with

a statement on the issue, as it raises serious questions about the alleged subversion of the will of the Assembly and a Committee of the Assembly by a senior civil servant?

Mr Speaker: I have some sympathy on the issue that has been raised this morning. Members on all sides of the House know that I continually encourage Ministers to come to the House with statements, especially important statements. At the end of the day, however, it very much rests with the Executive and the Minister what statements they bring to the House. However, I continually encourage Ministers, when I meet with them, especially the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to bring statements to the House because Members from all sides feel that that is very important.

Ministerial Statement

Public Expenditure: June Monitoring 2011-12

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Before I start my statement, I add my congratulations to Rory on his remarkable achievement. Many cynics might think that the reason for so much interest in golf in the House is that golfers have outdone us when it comes to the way in which they can lie. There are preferred lies, provisional lies, embedded lies and bad lies, and that might be why the press think that we have some interest in the issue. His is a remarkable achievement, and we should all be proud of it.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to update the Assembly on the 2010-11 provisional out-turn and the 2011-12 June monitoring round. I will start with the provisional out-turn before I go on to the detail of the June monitoring round. The provisional out-turn exercise is important, because it highlights the financial management performance of Departments in 2010-11. The outcome will also determine the resources that will have to be surrendered to Her Majesty's Treasury.

The context of the 2010-11 provisional out-turn exercise was the unwelcome decision by the UK Government to abolish the existing end-year flexibility (EYF) scheme. The impact of that decision was that the Northern Ireland Executive were not allowed to carry forward any unspent resources at the end of 2010-11 for drawdown in future years. As Members will be aware, separate arrangements apply to the Department of Justice (DOJ), which can carry forward resources under the deal that was struck as part of the devolution of policing and justice powers. I will say more about the impact of the Department of Justice on the overall provisional out-turn in a moment.

The provisional out-turn returns from Northern Ireland Departments, recorded underspends of £153.2 million in current expenditure and £28.1 million in capital investment respectively. That represented underspend at the total departmental level of 1.4% for current expenditure and 2% for capital investment

respectively. The detail for each Department is included in the annexes to this statement.

As I mentioned, it is important to separate out the figures for the Department of Justice. Of the total departmental underspend, that Department accounted for £83.8 million of current spending and £17.6 million of capital investment. That is not surprising, because the Department of Justice has access to automatic end-year flexibility. With some key financial pressures crystallising in 2011-12 and beyond, the incentive to minimise any underspend did not exist to the same extent for that Department as for the rest of the Northern Ireland Departments.

The provisional out-turn outcome shows that the trend of improved financial management since the restoration of devolution continued in 2010-11. As Members will be aware, any resources that are not used at the end of the year have to be surrendered to Her Majesty's Treasury, and that is why the Executive took the decision, as part of the 2010-11 February monitoring round, to task Departments with proactively identifying areas where further allocations could be made. That decision has reduced dramatically the resources that are now being handed back to Her Majesty's Treasury.

There were three ring-fenced current expenditure items that, if they were not spent, unavoidably had to be surrendered to Her Majesty's Treasury. That included £30 million provided by Her Majesty's Treasury for potentially increased depreciation costs for the Department for Regional Development (DRD) in converting to international financial reporting standards (IFRS). That was always allocated on the understanding that, if it was not needed, it would be returned to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Also, £7 million was surrendered from the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) student loans subsidy. Again, that money was allocated specifically by Her Majesty's Treasury for that purpose on the understanding that any unspent resources would be returned. Finally, we returned an underspend of £6.1 million from ring-fenced depreciation/impairment budgets. All those areas are tightly controlled by HM Treasury, and we could not reallocate unspent money or resources to other areas of our departmental expenditure limit. So, once those ring-fenced items have been stripped out along with the Department of Justice underspend,

the Executive will return just £1.6 million of current expenditure and £5.9 million of capital investment departmental expenditure limit to Her Majesty's Treasury.

12.30 pm

The surrender of some resources was always unavoidable, and, although I would have preferred not to have returned a single penny, that was never a realistic prospect. I do, however, believe that such a low level of effective underspend represents excellent performance by Departments, and that has undoubtedly helped to deliver vital public services to the people of Northern Ireland.

I will now turn to the second part of the statement and inform Members about the outcome of the June monitoring round. The starting point for the June monitoring round was the final 2011-15 Budget position, which included a £30 million overcommitment in both current and capital expenditure. There were also some modest Barnett allocations resulting from the 2011 UK Budget that was announced in late March. For 2011-12, that amounted to £9.1 million in current expenditure and £11.3 million in capital investment. As I have already mentioned, the UK Government's decision to abolish the end-year flexibility system means that the Northern Ireland Executive end-year flexibility stock of £316 million current expenditure has now been removed by Her Majesty's Treasury. I will continue to press Treasury Ministers on that issue and have, along with my Scottish and Welsh colleagues, argued strongly that that EYF stock should be returned.

As part of the 2010-11 December monitoring round, the Executive took the strategic decision to carry forward £23 million of capital departmental expenditure limit into 2011-12 under the HM Treasury one-off scheme. However, that has already been allocated as part of the 2011-15 Budget process, and, since there will be no end-year flexibility drawdown in 2011-12, no additional resources are available from that source at this time.

Before I set out the impact of those issues along with the resource movements in the monitoring round, I will highlight three issues, the first of which is the schools end-year flexibility scheme that the Executive have now agreed. That has been raised with me by a lot of Members who either are on boards of governors or have been contacted by boards of governors. Members will be aware that, in January 2011, I agreed

with the then Minister of Education that we should honour the previous Executive's commitment to guarantee that our schools can continue to have access to both past and, importantly, future savings. That is good management and enables schools to manage their budgets well. We have now agreed a new scheme that means that individual schools can continue to call on their reserves to plan financially and also build up savings in one year with access to those in future years if desirable. The scheme is not dependent — I want to make this clear — on Her Majesty's Treasury funding and is a local solution to a local problem. It is a real, tangible example of devolution working for our schools and for the people of Northern Ireland.

So, how will it work? In any one year, some schools draw down their reserve while others add to their savings. That means that, at an aggregate level, there will be either a net reduction or a net increase in the schools end-year flexibility stock in each year. Under the scheme, the Department of Education will bid for resources in the first monitoring round to cover any estimated pressure arising from the situation where the total aggregate drawdown on reserves exceeds what is saved in the specific year.

The Department of Education will then get the opportunity to revise that estimated pressure in the next monitoring round, which will lead to either a further bid for resources or a reduced requirement. If the schools end-year flexibility pressure is smaller than originally estimated, the schools end-year flexibility stock will be adjusted accordingly at that stage. Any changes after the second monitoring round declaration will have to be managed within the Department of Education, and there will be no further opportunity to amend the schools end-year flexibility stock. That means that the Department of Education and schools, individually, have an incentive to accurately estimate the net pressure at that stage, since any risk thereafter will lie with them. I think that that is a fair and sensible scheme, which will provide our schools with continuity in financial planning and allow much-needed flexibility to allocate resources between financial years.

The second issue that I will flag up relates to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and its ring-fenced position in monitoring rounds. The Public Prosecution Service has recently identified potential funding deficits in each

of the four years of the Budget 2010 period. I understand that steps have already been taken to address the deficit for the first two years. However, the Public Prosecution Service has said that years 3 and 4 will be difficult. Although the sums involved will be significant for PPS, they will be small in the overall Executive Budget.

The Public Prosecution Service is currently ring-fenced for budgeting purposes. However, given the additional pressures now identified, the Executive have agreed that the Public Prosecution Service will be brought into the mainstream monitoring process. That will afford the service the flexibility to bid for additional resources, if required. The decision does not impact on the Department of Justice, which remains ring-fenced.

The third and final issue that I will highlight is progress on the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS). Members will know that Budget 2011-15 made £50 million of current expenditure and £170 million loan facility under the reinvestment and reform initiative available to fund the resolution of the Presbyterian Mutual Society issue. That funding was to be held at the centre until the detail of the rescue package was agreed. I can confirm that the PMS rescue package has been finalised and was agreed with PMS creditors and members in May 2011. I understand that the administrator expects to be in a position to start making payments this summer. The £50 million current expenditure was, therefore, transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) as part of this monitoring round. The funding from the reinvestment and reform initiative borrowing will be made available to the Department when it confirms that it is needed.

I turn to Executive decisions in June monitoring. I will first deal with the reduced requirements. We entered this monitoring round with an overcommitment of £30 million in current and capital expenditure. Offset against that were Barnett consequential of some £20 million, arising from the UK 2011 Budget. The level of reduced requirement declared by Departments at this monitoring round was very modest: £6.6 million current expenditure and £0.3 million capital investment. That was not unexpected at this early stage of the financial year, particularly in the context of the tight Budget settlement. Full details in relation to those

reduced requirements are provided in the tables accompanying the statement.

A number of internal reallocations were made from that. In the highly constrained resource position, it is essential that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures within their existing allocations before bringing forward bids for additional allocations. I welcome any such proactivity by Ministers in managing emerging pressures. Although the public expenditure control framework allows Departments the scope to unilaterally undertake many such movements, proposed movements in excess of the de minimis threshold of £1 million are subject to Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) prior approval.

In some instances, Departments have also sought to move allocations across spending areas to facilitate the transfer of responsibility for a particular function from one business area to another. Where such movements exceed the de minimis threshold, they also need DFP prior approval. All approved movements are detailed in the tables attached to the statement. In addition to proactive movements of resources, there are some departmental allocations that, for technical reasons, were incorrectly classified. All proposed reclassifications require Executive approval, and those have been included in the tables accompanying the statement.

All of the above issues will impact on the effective overcommitment that the Executive will have to manage in this financial year. The net impact of those issues, including the 2011-15 Budget overcommitment, additional Barnett allocations, reduced requirements and reclassifications, was a residual overcommitment of £14.7 million in respect of current expenditure and £18 million in respect of capital investment. That was the financial context in which the Executive considered departmental bids for resources.

Departments submitted bids for additional resources of £61.7 million for current expenditure and £75.3 million for capital investment. Again, the individual bids by Departments are shown in the attached tables.

The Executive decided to make four current expenditure allocations and one capital allocation. The first expenditure allocation was £20.5 million to the Department of Education to cover the anticipated total net drawdown of school reserves in 2011-12. As

highlighted earlier, that represents the first initial estimate of the net drawdown in 2011-12, and the Department of Education will have an opportunity to revise that estimate in the next monitoring round. In that context, it is important to recognise that, should the estimated drawdown subsequently be revised downwards, the balance will have to be surrendered as a reduced requirement.

The second resource allocation was £3.7 million to the Department for Employment and Learning. That was to address a pressure in respect of employment services arising from the migration of individuals from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance or jobseeker's allowance. That allocation will ensure that the Department for Employment and Learning has the necessary resources to assist those individuals into active employment or training.

The third allocation was £3 million to the Department for Regional Development to fund the operation, maintenance, inspection and testing of street lighting in Northern Ireland. That funding will ensure that Roads Service can continue to meet its statutory duty to periodically test the highway power supply network. It will also allow Roads Service to properly maintain the street lighting system, which will promote road and pedestrian safety.

The fourth current expenditure allocation was £2 million to the Department of the Environment (DOE) to help address the significant pressure associated with the ongoing shortfall in planning receipts. The Department has already taken significant steps during the previous financial year to address that issue, but a residual pressure of £4.5 million remains in this financial year. In recognition of the increasing difficulty in managing that pressure within the Department of the Environment, the Executive agreed to provide £2 million to help the Department address the issue.

As I mentioned, there was only one capital allocation agreed by the Executive, which was £3.3 million to the Department for Social Development (DSD) to implement a first buy scheme in Northern Ireland. As part of the UK 2011 Budget, the UK Government announced a scheme to help first-time buyers. The Department for Social Development submitted a bid as part of the June monitoring round to implement a similar scheme locally. Under the proposed Northern Ireland scheme, first-time

buyers can obtain a mortgage to buy 80% of a new house, with the remaining 20% owned by the housing association. An alternative arrangement is one in which the housing association also acts as the developer. Given the difficulties facing first-time buyers in obtaining finance, the continued constrained banking situation locally and the absence of recovery in the local property market, the Executive agreed to fund that scheme.

12.45 pm

Those five allocations increased the residual overcommitment following the June monitoring round to £43.9 million of current expenditure and £21.2 million of capital expenditure. The Executive believe that that is a reasonable position at this stage of the financial year, although the scope to make further allocations later in the year will depend heavily on the amount of reduced requirements surrendered during the next monitoring rounds.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Northern Ireland Departments on another year of strong spending performance and financial management. Ultimately, that ensures that we maximise the delivery of public services for people in Northern Ireland. Although it was always unavoidable that we would have to surrender some resources to Treasury, the amounts surrendered were limited to 0.1% of current spending and 0.4% of capital spending. Although I would have preferred to hand back nothing, I believe that Departments have done their best in the most difficult of circumstances.

Members will be aware that I have engaged extensively with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury over recent months on the new end-year flexibility scheme proposed by the UK Government. The scheme is termed the Budget exchange scheme and does not allow any end-year carry-over of resources. That does not meet Northern Ireland's needs. Therefore, I have proposed an alternative scheme, which will allow for some capped amount of end-year resource carry-over. The caps that I have proposed amount to £50 million of current spending and £10 million of capital investment. I believe that that alternative scheme will provide a much better financial management incentive and improve value for money for the taxpayer. The Chief Secretary said that he would like to discuss any proposal further. I will meet

him at the end of June to discuss that and other financial issues.

As we exit June monitoring, it is clear that some Ministers have been left disappointed. In a context in which the demand for resources vastly exceeded the supply, that was always going to be the case. I do, however, believe that the allocations agreed by the Executive during the June monitoring round will make a real difference to the people of Northern Ireland. They will ensure that schools can continue to plan financially; that there will be further assistance for many unemployed people; and that street lighting will remain intact. Furthermore, there is now hope for first-time buyers who find it very difficult to access finance in the current economic climate. For those reasons, I commend the provisional out-turn 2010-11 and the June 2011-12 monitoring round to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Chair of the Finance Committee, Conor Murphy, I once again warn Members from all sides of the House that we do not want further statements; what we need are questions to the statement. I recognise that Members feel that, following statements on monitoring rounds, they should continually make statements to the House before coming to their question. Of course, there is some latitude for the Chairs of Committees. I recognise that Conor Murphy is speaking for and representing the Committee. As Chair, he has some latitude in developing his question.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, and thank you for that advice. I will try to adhere to it as best I can. I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome its content, which, encouragingly, shows a continued trend of improving financial management by Departments under the devolved Assembly. In the Treasury's plan for a Budget exchange scheme to replace EYF, it is regrettable that there is no recognition of our substantially improved situation in which Departments spend out year on year. The Treasury's unwelcome decision, as the Minister described it, to replace the EYF scheme with a Budget exchange scheme will have negative implications for Departments and the Executive.

In an attempt to reallocate money, Departments will now have to declare by October what they

consider might be their underspend, and there will be a lack of flexibility when it comes to the later monitoring rounds, towards the end of the financial year. The Minister referred to that as an unwelcome decision. Perhaps he can elaborate on what he considers the implications of that will be for Departments and the Executive. Will he also elaborate on his ongoing discussions with the Treasury and what arguments he is putting to it?

He raised the issue of the EYF stock that was raided from us last year. Has he had any success in trying to recover some of that from the Treasury? How are those discussions progressing?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for those questions. The EYF issue is something that we will continue to pursue with the Treasury, because I believe that it lies at the very heart of good, sound financial management in Northern Ireland. If we do not have a scheme that is workable, the implication is that, by October, we will have to try to anticipate what projects might fall by the wayside and what spending might not materialise over the last six months of this year. Members will know that if, for example, a capital project is going forward, there can be delays owing to planning permissions not coming through or contracts and procurement processes getting slowed down. Sometimes with some of the current spending, situations that we thought were going to materialise do not and things that we could never have anticipated occur. Therefore, we need flexibility. To try to anticipate all that six months from the end of the year is very difficult. If there were then a big reduction in spending because some big project falls by the wayside, we would finish up either handing the money back or spending it at the last minute on projects that were not really a high priority in the first place but that we just happen to be able to spend the money on. That is not good, sound financial management. However, if something is identified early on, there is plenty of time to reallocate that money. That is where the Treasury scheme is a bit of a nonsense. There really is no flexibility built into it.

The Member asks what arguments we will be employing with the Treasury. The first argument is that we have now got to a level of financial management that no direct rule Minister was ever able to get anywhere near. Indeed, our capital underspend this year is one tenth of the average when we had direct rule Ministers. Our

current underspend is half of the average during the period of direct rule. We have improved. The Treasury was concerned that we were building up huge stocks of underspend, which would mean that financial planning over future years would be difficult. The first thing that we will be saying is that, as we have tightened our spending to such a level, we are not going to carry massive amounts of underspend from one year to the next.

The Government are always talking about making sure that we get value for money when it comes to how public resources are used. Therefore, the second thing that we will say is that, if the Government want devolution to work, devolved Administrations should not be given incentives simply to squander money at the end of the year rather than endure the embarrassment of giving it back.

The third thing that we will say is that we are proposing a scheme that we believe is workable. It is a very modest cap, yet it gives us a safety valve at the end of the year if money is declared in the last couple of months of the financial year. Those are the kinds of arguments that we will be employing.

As for the EYF stock, there will be ongoing discussions with the Treasury, but I do not want to build up Members' hopes. The issue has been kicked to death with the Treasury. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have also raised it at joint ministerial council meetings, and we will continue to press it. The Scottish and Welsh Administrations are solid with us on the issue and, every time we have a quadrilateral meeting, the issue is raised. However, I do not want to raise expectations in the Assembly that we will be able to recoup some of the money.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. In light of the comments that have been made, is the Minister confident that the residual capital and current expenditure can be met within the current financial year? With the removal of EYF and how that will factor later, is there any progress on the rescheduling of EYF for later in the year, say, in October?

Mr Wilson: I assume that the Member is referring to whether we can deal with the overcommitment. We are now sitting with a larger overcommitment than we started off with; I think it is about £5 million more. I explained how the EYF for education was to operate. It will

be tight, and the Department of Education is quite right to be prudent at this time, but I am fairly convinced that it will find that it does not need all the £25.5 million that it was allocated. That money was allocated on the basis that we wished to give schools the assurance that they could safely budget for putting money aside for future years without any danger of that money being lost. Getting confidence into the system was quite important.

Furthermore, it is only two months into the financial year, and, when the returns were made, we were less than two months into the financial year. At this stage, Departments are always very cautious about whether they are likely to have underspends or reduced requirements in some areas, especially in a tight spending situation, and they will probably firm up that position around September. However, I think that we should be able to deal with the overcommitment or start bringing it down at that stage.

When I made the Budget statement, I said that we will require absolute diligence and financial management. We wanted to get to a situation where we ensured that we used all our resources and did not have to give any back to Treasury, hence the reason for putting the overcommitment in. Even in relation to tighter management of finances, we believed that the overcommitment was still realistic, and I think that we will finish the end of the year being able to see out that overcommitment and not find ourselves running against the Treasury because we have overspent.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for his statement. It made fairly good reading. I will stay with end-year flexibility, particularly with respect to schools. From what I understand of the Minister's statement, he is suggesting that EYF for schools will be self-financing. Is that realistic, bearing in mind that all schools are under a lot of financial pressure at this time and that it will be a big demand on their budgets?

Mr Wilson: It will be self-financing, and it has been self-financing in previous years, but I accept the point that the Member has made. School budgets will be tighter this year than they have ever been. Therefore, schools may wish to make some drawdown, but, do not forget, when drawdown has been made once, it cannot be made again. Therefore, it creates a pressure in this year or whatever year there is a net drawdown, and the liability of the Executive is

reduced because it is only as savings are made that the liability increases again.

Most schools have part of their budget allocated, because they have thought ahead to whether they will need to replace computers, repaint or get new equipment, etc.

Some schools, including ones in my constituency, have worked on the basis that, by making savings, they might be able to employ an extra classroom assistant to help pupils with special needs or whatever. School governors make those decisions.

1.00 pm

Even when schools knew that they would face a tight budget this year, some of the mad spending that occurred when they thought that they would lose money in January was not, in my view, the way to manage public resources. For that reason and because there was such uncertainty, we wanted to give them assurance. The Minister of Education is happy that the statement and the resources that have been made available mean that schools can have absolute certainty that, if they need to use resources, they will be available. Of course, if schools continue to behave in the same way, they have nothing to fear. Why would they not, when it makes for a school's good financial management? That is a commitment. If there is a net drawdown, we have made a commitment to meet that net drawdown. I have made that commitment publicly. Whatever we have to do to meet that net drawdown, we will do it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and for indications that there have been improvements in financial management. Several things are to be welcomed, in particular the first-time buyers scheme. What factors did most to sway the Minister in favour of DSD's bid for a first-time buyers scheme as opposed to a similar amount for a mortgage rescue scheme?

Mr Wilson: The first factor was the case that was made by DSD. Secondly, the money was allocated as a Barnett consequential. I think that the Treasury allocated a total Barnett consequential of £7 million to Northern Ireland for our apportionment of that scheme. Thirdly, the message came through that many people who did not want to get into the rented sector were prevented from buying their first home because they could not afford a deposit. The

availability of 20% equity in a house will help many young buyers. Fourthly, we have given a commitment that we will do everything that we can to kick-start Northern Ireland's construction industry and get the market moving again. As building new houses is fairly labour-intensive, it is a useful means by which to help the construction industry.

The amounts of money that are involved in the mortgage support scheme and, indeed, how long and effective it would be were other factors that we took into consideration. Such schemes have not been all that effective in other places. For all the reasons that I have given, our judgement was that the first-time buyers scheme is a better way of doing it. I know that DSD welcomes the fact that that money has been allocated to that scheme. Do not forget that, on the basis of the average house price, it represents about 600 houses. I am trying to work it out off the top of my head. Potentially, it could affect 600 people.

Ms Lo: I welcome the allocation of £2 million to the Department of the Environment to make up for the shortfall in planning receipts. However, the Committee recognised the need for £4.5 million to cover the full shortfall. It supported the Department's bid for £4.5 million accordingly. Can the Minister tell the House how, he anticipates, the Department will make up the difference of £2.5 million and what impact he thinks that might have on jobs and the Department's statutory functions?

Mr Wilson: As the Member will know, because she is an assiduous member of the Committee, the Department published its savings delivery plan. That plan was predicated on the fact that there would be a further reduction this year in the receipts from planning permissions. DOE has already started the process by moving some people out of the Planning Service to other Departments. Indeed, my Department has taken on some of those people to work in Land and Property Services (LPS), which will hopefully reduce our EU fines for the single farm payment scheme.

I suppose the savings delivery plan will continue to look to reallocate some of the workforce. There are savings from a reduction in the number of people employed and reallocations to other Departments. If it eventually leads to redundancies — I am not really past the detail of the DOE savings delivery plan — that

will be the ultimate step that has to be taken. However, DOE was happy that it could take half the burden of the reductions, if it could get an allocation that provided money for the other 50% through the June monitoring round.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his statement. In trying to develop an alternative to the Budget exchange scheme, will you give us any detail of the discussions that you have had with Her Majesty's Treasury?

Mr Wilson: So far, the discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury — we have been doing it on a joint basis as the three Administrations — have been to the effect that the stock that has gone back should not have gone back. As I said, it will be an uphill struggle to get any movement on that. The first position, of course, was, "OK. You have taken the stock off us. You have dealt with the large surpluses that you were concerned about being carried forward, so at least now reintroduce the scheme". That has not found favour with the Treasury.

I am meeting the first secretary of the Treasury at the end of June, because we are making a Northern Ireland-tailored proposal. The Scottish and Welsh would still prefer that we just reverted to the old scheme. The second step is that we have a scheme that is capped. The attraction of that for the Treasury is that it will not become an open-ended commitment with huge surpluses. Do not forget that some of the huge surpluses were a result of underspends that happened before this Assembly was set up. Direct rule Ministers did not run budgets very well, hence the big surpluses that accumulated. I do not believe that you would get that level of surplus even if you introduced the same scheme again. Nevertheless, to try to anticipate some of the Treasury's objections, we have suggested that they be capped at fairly modest amounts. From experience and from looking at what happened in the February monitoring round last year, for example, if we had that degree of flexibility, we could probably manage any surprise underspends by Departments in the last couple of months of the year.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement. On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I particularly welcome the allocation of £3.3 million to the first-time buyer scheme. The Minister outlined

that that may help a number of people, particularly younger people, who are trying to get on the housing ladder and get themselves a home.

The Committee has been briefed that, because of the welfare reform programme, anything between £450 million and £500 million could be taken out of the local economy over the next number of years. Given that that would probably bear down more heavily on the poorest or most disadvantaged in our community, will the Minister give some commitment or assurance that, in future monitoring rounds, bids for proposals such as the mortgage relief or first-time buyer schemes are given very positive consideration?

Mr Wilson: The Member will be aware that we are still finalising the details of the social investment fund, which will have £80 million over the next four years, and the social protection fund, to which £20 million has been allocated for this year. Bids can be made to those two schemes. Many in the Assembly were cynical about those schemes, but they are genuine attempts, despite what the cynics might think, to help areas and people who were disadvantaged as a result of the current recession. I am unsure how many or what type of bids will be made for those schemes. However, a total pot of £100 million is available, and that should help with some of the things that the Member mentioned.

As the Member has given me the opportunity, I also want to say something about the money that will be given to first-time buyers. I may have said that 600 first-time buyers would be affected by the scheme. However, it is probably more like 200, although that is still a substantial number of people who will have an opportunity to purchase a house at current prices.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Minister, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for all their hard work on the Presbyterian Mutual Society. I also welcome the transfer of the funding to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the Presbyterian Mutual Society and the rescue package. The Minister mentioned that payments would be made this summer. When will those with investments with the Presbyterian Mutual Society actually receive their money?

Mr Wilson: The payments will not be processed by the Department of Finance and Personnel or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that will be up to the administrator. We have said that the money is now available for the administrator to draw down. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has the first £50 million. That was made available from current spending, and it is made up of £25 million from the Treasury and £25 million from our own resources. Any drawdown from the £175 million of borrowing available will be on the basis of demand.

The Member's question is one for the administrator to answer. All I can say at this stage is that there will be no delay as a result of funds not being made available by the Executive, and I wanted to make that clear in my statement.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. Will the Minister explain why the £30 million budget cover in respect of DRD — the IFRS depreciation — was not required and was, therefore, returned? Similarly, will the Minister say why there was an underspend at block level in the depreciation resource budget? Finally, will the Minister tell the House whether, in advance of the conclusion of the consultation on corporation tax, he has had discussions with the Office for Budget Responsibility about the actual figure that could be deducted from the block grant, if we were to get a reduction in corporation tax?

Mr Wilson: Moving to a new accounting system changed the way in which depreciation figures were treated. It was a Treasury requirement that we moved to the new system. The Treasury understood that it was a non-cash cost that would need to be attributed to the Budget, and it estimated the cost of that new accounting treatment on the basis of the physical assets that we have in Northern Ireland. It was inevitably going to be an estimate until the value of the assets and the way in which depreciation was going to be entered into the books was worked through. However, there was always an understanding that, if our and the Treasury's estimates were wrong, since this was a one-off thing in which we were simply changing the accounting method, the money would go back to Treasury and we would be unable to keep it. That is a pity, but that was the way of it and it was an outcome of the changes that were made. Please do not ask me to explain the changes to the way in which the accounts were dealt with. As a

qualified accountant, Mr Hamilton might be able to deal with that better than I can; nevertheless, that is the way that it worked.

1.15 pm

Once the consultation is over and we decide on the way forward, the whole issue of how much corporation tax is paid by Northern Ireland at present will have to be determined. Some people say that that should be easy, but it is not. What year do you take? Do you take an average over a number of years? Which years do you choose for that? Even then, it is not always transparent where the corporation tax liability arose. In some cases, companies might have individual profit centres, and so you can say, "That profit centre is in Scotland, that one is in Northern Ireland, and the third is the company's branch in England". In other cases, it might be that a total figure is presented and you must apportion where the profit arose. So there are a lot of imponderables.

Furthermore, the amount of corporation tax is only one issue in those discussions. Also discussed will be the question of how much corporation tax the Treasury assumes. It does not have to do this, but it does it at the moment. Europe does not require the Treasury to do that, even under the Azores ruling. How much does it assume the amount of profit that will be moved from other places into Northern Ireland? They have put down a figure for that, which we believe is extremely high and about which Europe has said, "Wait and see for a couple of years and then make the judgement". Also, what other tax revenues, as a result of new investment in Northern Ireland, can be written off against tax? So there are a lot of areas for discussion. I have made it clear time and again that we must not imperil the things that we do, the services that we give and the support we give to industry by accepting a huge, unreasonable and unfair burden for the devolution of corporation tax.

Mr Speaker: Mr Hussey, do you want to speak? No, I see that the Member is all right.

Mr Storey: I welcome the Minister's statement in relation to the EYF scheme. Other Members have commented on it. Along with them, I welcome the fact that he has been able to find a way that, I trust, will give some comfort to schools in how they manage their budgets, given the current financial problems in the Department of Education. I understand that some resource allocation plans, including one in

my education and library board area, have been returned to the board by the Minister, and I have grave concerns —

Mr Speaker: I invite the Member to come to his question.

Mr Storey: I thought, Mr Speaker, that you said that Committee Chairs would have some degree of latitude. It must have been curtailed.

Mr Speaker: Order. No. I ask the Member to take his seat. Most Members have been here long enough to know that latitude is given to the Chair of the appropriate Committee. For example, had the Education Minister made a statement, the Chair of that Committee would have had priority. If it were the Minister of the Environment making a statement, the Chair of that Committee would have priority. Today, Mr Conor Murphy, the Chair of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, was given latitude to say what he needed to prioritise and then ask his question. I remind the whole House of that.

Mr Storey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try again. In the light of that issue with regard to the financial delays in the Department of Education and given the situation in relation to the out-turns from that Department for 2010-11, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that the Department of Education and the Department of Finance and Personnel sing off the same hymn sheet to ensure that no additional pressure is put on that Department?

Mr Wilson: As I outlined in my statement, we have been generous in the allocation made in the June monitoring round. The Department has probably made a fairly liberal estimate in its bid of what it needs. It should not have any difficulty meeting the demand from schools. However, as the year goes on, the Department of Education and schools have a duty to decide realistically how much they will need for the EYF scheme; in other words, they must make an assessment. They will probably know better by September what the drawdowns will be and what the schools' savings patterns will be. At that stage, they can make a decision on exactly how much is required. There is an incentive: if they have too much, they will end up with a big underspend and will be penalised, and, if it is too little, they will have an overspend. Schools and the Department have to monitor the situation fairly closely. We have not agreed that there is an open chequebook so that they can draw down as much as they want

and then hand it all back at the end of the year. I have mentioned time and again that we have a problem at the end of the year if too much is held in the education budget and it is all returned in March. That would mean the Department of Education being responsible for money that could have been used somewhere else being returned to the Treasury.

There is a discipline both ways: we have to commit to give whatever the Department deems necessary, and the Department has to provide more realistic figures later in the year so that it does not finish up with an overspend, which would have implications for the Department, or an underspend, which would have implications for public spending in Northern Ireland as a whole. I am sure that no Education Minister, given how tight the budgetary situation is, would wish to be held responsible for giving the Treasury back a pile of money that he had held until the last minute in the hope that schools might draw it down.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I particularly welcome the allocation of £3.7 million to the Department for Employment and Learning to at least partly address the pressures arising from the incapacity benefit migration under the welfare reforms. Does the Minister agree that it is important that Northern Ireland retains parity with but does not just parrot Great Britain with respect to the level of benefits, as well as delivering the quality of service and programmes that we have and need for Northern Ireland?

Mr Wilson: Yes. The allocation of £3.7 million was made because we wanted to ensure equality. If people are being moved off benefit and told that they have to go either on to jobseeker's allowance or into work, they will have all sorts of reasons why they have not been working. Some of them may be difficult cases and will not have worked for a long time, and it is important that we give them the training opportunities that will enable them to be more marketable in the workplace.

Do not forget our general economic strategy of making Northern Ireland a more attractive place for firms to come. We have to have people with skills at all levels, from graduate level right down the scale to people who might be described as semi-skilled. There is a need to increase the economically active percentage of the population. One reason why I do not think

that we should totally turn our back on a lot of the welfare reform that is being introduced is that it is important that we give people the dignity of work. If benefit changes are pushing them in that direction, it is important that we as a Government create the opportunities and make the resources available to give them the training that they require to move into work.

Mr Douglas: I congratulate the Minister on his statement. I welcome the remarks that he made about the social investment fund and the social protection scheme, as well as his decision to fund the first-buy scheme. Does the Minister agree that, given the difficulties that many young people face in getting mortgage finance, support for such a scheme is vital and will undoubtedly assist the kick-starting of the property sector?

Mr Wilson: Yes. I outlined four or five reasons in earlier answers why it is important that we make that allocation. Many of the people who come into my advice centre cannot get a home of their own because they cannot get into the property market. Those people really do not want to go into the rental sector and would prefer to own their home. Builders want to start building homes, and the prices of houses for first-time buyers have been brought down to a realistic level. I look around east Antrim, and I see that there are plenty of houses coming on to the market at £80,000 and £85,000, which pushes prices down more towards the realm of affordability. This scheme, with 20% equity being taken by the housing association, reduces that even further, which makes housing affordable and gives people the opportunity to take responsibility for their own housing.

Mr McDevitt: Most people will recognise the good work done by the Executive in putting together the Presbyterian Mutual Society rescue package. Will the Minister inform the House whether the Executive's loan element of £175 million is legally secured against the assets of the PMS?

Mr Wilson: The £175 million is an increased borrowing facility — I want to make that clear — that has been made available to us, so it does not impact on, for example, any of the capital schemes. That money is simply borrowed under the normal terms for government borrowing in Northern Ireland. In fact, it is not even borrowed over the timescale of the resale of a lot of the assets of the Presbyterian Mutual Society; it is borrowed under normal borrowing requirements,

whether the repayment period is over 20 years, 50 years or whatever it happens to be. So, it is not secured against those assets. However, with the due diligence exercise that has been undertaken, we have always believed that, given sufficient time, the sale of the assets of the Presbyterian Mutual Society, if sold in a controlled way over a longer period, will enable us not only to repay the loan but to pay the interest on it.

Mr Allister: I take the Minister back to some of what he had to say about the provisional out-turn and seek some clarification from him. He identified that, in current expenditure, there was an underspend of £153.2 million. He then proceeded to tell us that we could discount £83.8 million of that, because it was money that went to the DOJ, which had an exemption. Then there were three ring-fenced items, which totalled £43.1 million. He then told us that, as a consequence of the Department of Justice's underspend and those ring-fenced items being stripped out, the Executive will return just £1.6 million of current expenditure. When you look at the table at annex A1 in the Minister's statement or do the mathematics of subtracting £126.9 million from £153.2 million, you can see that you do not get £1.6 million. So, how do we arrive at £1.6 million? Would it not be better to have at annex A1 a table with a column to show exactly how that figure was arrived at?

Mr Wilson: If further detail is needed, I will write to the Member. We also made allocations in February to Departments. When we debated the statement of accounts last week, he queried the £23 million — I cannot remember the figure off the top of my head — that went to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). That money has filled some of the gap. I will supply figures to show where the money has gone.

If we take the ring-fenced money, the Department of Justice money and the money that was allocated towards the end of the year after the February monitoring round, the gap closes to £1.6 million. I will supply the Member with those figures; I cannot remember off the top of my head what went where. I think that money went on teachers' superannuation and to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. There might have been an allocation somewhere else, but I cannot remember. Since I cannot remember the figures off the top of my head, I will supply him with them.

1.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] be agreed.

Today's Second Stage debate follows the Assembly's approval last week of the Supply resolution for the expenditure plans of Departments and other public bodies as detailed in the 2011-12 Main Estimates and the second Supply resolution for the excess expenditure by two Departments in 2009-2010. That excess expenditure was the gap that Mr Allister referred to in the question that he just asked.

As Members will appreciate, and given that the Budget 2011-15 was not approved until March, accelerated passage for the Bill is necessary to ensure that Royal Assent is received prior to the end of July. If the Bill does not proceed by accelerated passage and receive Assembly approval before the summer recess, Departments and other public bodies could run out of cash, and public services could grind to a halt prior to our return to the Chamber in September. However, I am glad to note that the Bill can be given accelerated passage, because the Committee for Finance and Personnel has confirmed that, in line with Standing Order 42, it is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the Bill's public expenditure proposals. The Committee of the previous mandate took evidence on several occasions during the development of the Budget 2011-15, of which the Bill represents the first year. Indeed, that Committee also played a useful and constructive role in co-ordinating the responses of all the Committees.

I thank the Committee for agreeing to accelerated passage, especially as I know that it has concerns, which I share, that some Ministers and Departments did not engage adequately with their Committees or provide timely and sufficient evidence to facilitate their scrutiny role during the Budget process. That is to be regretted, and I feel strongly that the Assembly must tackle that sooner rather than

later during this mandate. I hope, of course, that having a new bunch of Ministers means that we will not have a repeat performance during this mandate, even though some of them were the ones who complained about that issue.

Mr McNarry: Name them.

Mr Wilson: I will name them, but you might be embarrassed.

In accordance with the nature of a Second Stage debate as envisaged in Standing Order 32, and for Members' benefit, I shall endeavour to confine my remarks to the general principles of the Bill and its provisions. The main purpose of the Bill is to make further provision of cash and resources for use on services in addition to the Vote on Account, provided in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 in March, up to the requirements of Departments and other public bodies set out in the Main Estimates for 2011-12. In addition, the Bill makes provision for excess expenditure by two Departments in 2009-2010 over the amounts approved in the 2009-2010 spring Supplementary Estimates (SSE) and the related Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2010. Copies of the Budget Bill and the explanatory and financial memorandum have been made available to Members today, and the 2011-12 Main Estimates and the 2009-2010 Statements of Excess were laid in the Assembly on 6 June.

The Bill will authorise the issue of a further — I love saying this — £8,141,695,000 from the Consolidated Fund and a further use of resources totalling £8,656,468,000 by the Departments and certain other bodies listed in schedules 1 and 2 to the Bill. The cash and resources are to be spent and used on the services listed in column 1 of each schedule. Of course, those amounts are in addition to the Vote on Account that the Assembly passed in March, bringing the total amount of cash provided in 2011-12 to almost £15 billion.

In addition, the Bill sets for the current financial year a limit for each Department on the use of accruing resources. For the uninitiated, accruing resources are current and capital receipts, and they total £2,116,272,000. The resources authorised in the Vote on Account in March, and the resources and accruing resources now provided in this Bill, bring the total resources for use by Departments in 2011-12 to over £18 billion. Those amounts include not only the departmental expenditure limits (DEL) on

which our Budget process mainly focuses, but the departmental demand-led annually managed expenditure (AME).

Clause 2 of the Bill provides for the temporary borrowing by my Department of £4,070,847,000. That is approximately half the sum authorised by clause 1(1) for issue from the Consolidated Fund. I must stress that clause 5 does not provide for any additional cash out of the Consolidated Fund or convey any additional spending power, but it does enable my Department to run an effective and efficient cash management regime and ensure minimum drawdown of the Northern Ireland block grant on a daily basis, which is very important when contemplating the daily borrowing of our nation.

Clauses 5 and 6 make provision for the excesses of over £23 million cash and over £14 million resources by the Agriculture Department in an excess use of resources and of some £3.7 million by the Department of Education's superannuation scheme. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), in its seventh report on the 2010-11 session of the last Assembly, has recommended, on the basis of its examination of the reasons for the excesses, that the Assembly provides the necessary amounts by means of Excess Votes. Finally, clause 7 removes from the statute book two Budget Acts from 2008 that are no longer operative.

As we progress into the first year of the Budget 2011-15, Departments must strive to live within budget, making efficiencies wherever possible. I appreciate that that will not be easy for Departments and that many difficult decisions will have to be made — decisions that may mean reducing spending on lower-priority areas in order to maintain spend on front line services and high-priority areas. At the same time, capital receipts identified in the Budget must be realised by Departments, and the work of the central asset management group must produce additional capital receipts over the Budget period, including £10 million that is factored into this year.

Much hard work lies ahead for all concerned. The Budget review group will continue to consider further revenue-raising options. Once those have been considered sufficiently robust, they will be incorporated into departmental allocations through the in-year monitoring rounds or in a future Budget process. On that note, I will conclude, and I will be happy to

deal with any points of principle or detail of the Budget Bill that Members may wish to raise.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At its meeting on 1 June 2011, the Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence from senior Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on the Budget (No. 2) Bill, the general principles of which are being debated.

As outlined, the Bill makes provision for a balance of cash and resources required to reflect departmental spending plans in the 2011-12 Main Estimates. Those are based on the first year of the former Executive's 2011-15 Budget, approved on 9 March in the previous mandate of the Assembly. The Budget (No. 2) Bill also includes provision for excess cash and resource requirements by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Education for 2009-2010, which were not anticipated in the 2009-2010 spring Supplementary Estimates. The Committee noted that that matter had been considered by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) and the Public Accounts Committee, which recommended that the necessary sums be provided by Excess Votes by the Assembly. The relevant statutory Committees have noted the PAC recommendation in that regard.

The Committee is aware of the potential consequences for departmental spending should the Bill not progress through the Assembly before summer recess. In that context, although the new Committee will be taking forward recommendations from its predecessor aimed at enhancing the role of Assembly Committees in Budget scrutiny, members were satisfied that, on this occasion, there had been appropriate consultation with the Committee on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill in accordance with Standing Order 42(2). The Committee was, therefore, content that the Bill can proceed by accelerated passage. I wrote to you on 8 June, Mr Speaker, to confirm that.

The Committee is mindful of the concerns raised in its predecessor's report on the Executive's draft Budget 2011-15 that a majority of the other Committees had reported a lack of engagement by their respective Departments on departmental spending proposals. Its concerns

were over the level of detail provided and the fact that there was insufficient time for scrutiny. Those issues were examined further in the previous Committee's third Budget scrutiny inquiry report. Concerned that such lack of engagement by Departments compromises the ability of the Assembly to fulfil its scrutiny role effectively, the third report set out measures aimed at establishing stronger procedures and processes.

In particular, it was considered that early structured engagement between Departments and Statutory Committees is essential, as there is less opportunity to influence plans once a draft Budget has been produced. Indeed, senior DFP officials told the previous Finance Committee that movements between draft and final Budgets tend to be minimal. It was also considered that formal engagement at an early stage would facilitate the streamlining of the latter stages of the Budget and Estimates process, including plenary debates.

My Committee is scheduled to have informal discussions with DFP officials on Wednesday on the Executive's forthcoming review of the financial process. The review's terms of reference state that the overall aim is:

"to create a single coherent financial framework that is effective, efficient and transparent and enhances scrutiny by and accountability to the Assembly, taking into account the needs of the Assembly."

The Finance Committee will be taking a proactive approach to ensuring that the needs of the Assembly and its Committees are set out at an early stage in the review process, with a view to ensuring that issues regarding the Assembly's important role in the Budget and financial scrutiny are addressed as part of that review.

The previous Committee also recommended that the wording of Standing Order 42(2) be reviewed in order to clarify that the Finance Committee, when considering whether to grant accelerated passage to Budget Bills, should also have regard to the views of other appropriate Committees on the level of engagement with their respective Departments. That recommendation has been endorsed by the new Committee, and, in the coming weeks, we will examine how that can be best taken forward.

In the meantime, I will return to the more immediate issues before us. On behalf of the Committee, I support the Bill's general principles. I note that the Minister and many other Members salivate at the prospect of billions of pounds being allocated towards the deal, but the Minister will be aware, as will all Members, that, despite that allocation of billions, we are still far short of the requirement of the Assembly and the Executive to do the many programmes that we would like to do in the community.

Mr Girvan: I, too, stand to speak in favour of the Bill and to give an outline of what happened and how we came to this stage, as has already been alluded to. It was not without pain. A number of us were not necessarily that happy with the way in which some of the information was presented. I know that some of the Committees had difficulty in engaging and coming forward with some detail. I appreciate that the Budget has been set to allow Departments to make the necessary spend. Very much a legislative approach has been taken; otherwise, the country would run out of money, and we cannot allow that to happen.

We were to rebalance our economy. That was the main focus. Our economy strongly depends on the public sector, so it is necessary that we grow our private sector. It is interesting to note that, during May, an announcement was made of a further 600 job losses in the Province, the majority of which were in the private sector. That is a sector that we identified as a necessity to grow.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has identified a further £18.8 million to be spent on growing that section of our economy. For example, a number of businesses in neighbourhood renewal areas and those involved in knowledge-based processing and outsourcing will be identified. That money, if it is properly identified, and the predictions are that it will be, will be invested in those areas, and that could create up to 9,000 long-term jobs. We hope that that will go some of the way towards rebalancing our economy.

1.45 pm

During the Budget process, it was also vital to hold down rates for property by not introducing water charges. That issue could have arisen, and I appreciate that we have managed to hold it back. That is something for which we

should thank the Department of Finance and Personnel. I know that the Executive have made a commitment not to introduce water charges, and that is something that we should stick to.

Northern Ireland has some of the lowest rates in the United Kingdom. We need to help those who are disadvantaged. As was commented on in the previous Budget statement, a lot of people are living on the breadline. The Budget, and spending in Departments, has been targeted to make the best use of the money available in areas where there is need.

The social investment fund was mentioned. The money that was set aside for that, along with that for the social protection fund, is intended to be used for work in areas of serious disadvantage, for those communities that perhaps feel that they have been left behind, and to target areas of spend to deliver for those communities. That is something that we need to do.

It is also important to point out that the efficiencies that are to be brought out through the process are to be targeted. We have the Budget review group, the invest to save initiative and the issue of end-year flexibility, which may create its own problems in the long run. We have to target those areas and make sure that we deliver for the overall economy. I am a relatively new member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and some people have said that the process has been as painful as putting pins in your eyes, but for those of us who quite enjoy interrogating figures, there is benefit to be gained from working our way forward.

Although I am not sure that they are all overly interested, it is evident from the number of Members in the Chamber that this is one of the most important debates that is taking place today. There will be people who will not get opportunities if we do not get the Bill through today. I appreciate that we can use the accelerated passage procedure to allow that to happen, but if we do not get a commitment in the Chamber today, there is the potential for bigger problems down the road. We have to move this forward. It is unfortunate that things came very late in the day. We mentioned that the Budget was set in March, and that has created its own problems, because it was extremely difficult to obtain all the statistics and

relevant information. I am happy to support the Bill as presented.

Mr Hussey: First, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. I also take the opportunity to reiterate what my colleague Mr Leslie Cree said during last week's debate, namely that the Budget process is long and drawn out and needs to be simplified. That should happen as quickly as possible, not least to improve the transparency of the process, for the public as well as politicians.

Last Monday's debate on the Supply resolution motions was important in that it fulfilled the legal position to enable us to have the Budget (No. 2) Bill debate today. Last week, the Ulster Unionist Party set out its support for those resolutions. Today's vote is important, because it will give legislative effect to the Budget for 2011-12. The Ulster Unionist Party will support this stage of the Budget process for the same reasons that we gave in support of last week's motions. We will not frustrate what is an essential process in the provision of services to the people of Northern Ireland, as outlined in the Estimates. Previous contributors to the debate have indicated that, without that process, essential funding would not be available.

The Budget must be looked at in context. We are facing a reduction in spending in the region of £4 billion between 2011 and 2015 as we seek to address the UK economy deficit. That, of course, is down to the problems in the United Kingdom's banking sector, which were compounded by the Labour Government spending spree that saddled the UK with a mountain of debt.

That debt now has to be repaid. Thanks to the actions of an irresponsible Labour Government, the UK is spending in the region of £280,000 a minute, or £120 million a day, on debt interest. That equates to £43 billion a year, and that situation obviously needs to be addressed.

In Europe, the plight of Greece, which is once again in the news today, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hussey: Not at the minute, if you do not mind.

Mr McNarry: Good move. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Hussey: I am too young and innocent, so I will carry on.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts and strict controls over public spending are the order of the day. Those are the circumstances that we are in, and Northern Ireland is not immune to its share of that pain.

It is also useful to note David Cameron's words to the Assembly just 11 days ago:

"Northern Ireland continues to receive 25 more per head in public spending than England. The days are over when the answer to every problem is simply to ask the Treasury for more money."

That was a clear sign that we must get on with things in Northern Ireland and seek to use the Budget that we have as best we can.

That is not to say that we do not have concerns about the Budget, and a number of party colleagues dealt with issues relating to specific Departments; for example, the Maze/Long Kesh site. In previous debates, before my time in the Chamber, Members from my party outlined their concerns about the four-year Budget for 2011-15. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that there are still issues in that Budget that have not been adequately addressed, including the one relating to Belfast port, which has been cited as a source from which to raise tens of millions of pounds. However, that would require a change in legislation in Westminster. In addition, over £80 million is supposed to be raised from housing association reserves over four years; EU funding access might equate to £64 million over four years; and a review of arm's-length bodies could lead to savings of £10 million over four years. We should not forget the £177 million shortfall in the Health budget foretold by my party during the draft Budget stage. Issues relating to such areas were not clarified, and they will have a knock-on effect on the viability of the Budget in the year ahead. Therefore, the Ulster Unionist Party's arguments about the four-year Budget largely remain with respect to the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Moving on to specific points in the Bill, I pay particular attention to the Department of Justice's budget. As a former RUC Reservist and a current member of the Policing Board, I am particularly keen to ensure that we have adequate funding to tackle the dissident threat. It is fundamental that the Department has the

necessary funding to do that. The extra £200 million security funding from the Treasury will be vital in that respect. Although this is perhaps unrelated to the Bill, I take this opportunity to express my disappointment with the current situation with the RUC GC part-time Reserve gratuity scheme, which still has to be paid. I hope that that situation can be resolved soon.

I must also mention end-year flexibility, which is an extremely pertinent consideration for Departments this year due to the changes that have occurred. With excess money now being handed back to the Treasury if unspent, we must ensure that budgetary discipline is as tight as possible. I am sure that Ministers are acutely aware of that. In fact, the Finance Minister agrees with that; he would prefer not to return a single penny. I wholeheartedly concur.

In conclusion, the Ulster Unionist Party has approached the Budget in a positive manner, and, despite some concerns, it will not seek to stop the Bill's course through the legislative process. For that reason, we support the Bill.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, I state that the SDLP will not divide the House on this issue. We have engaged robustly with the Minister throughout the process. My predecessor —

Mr Campbell: You have forgotten him.

Mr Hamilton: The electorate forgot him.

Mr D Bradley: — Mr O'Loan, is gone but not forgotten.

We raised many issues during the debate on the Supply resolutions; however, there are a number of details that I would like to interrogate further today. In particular, I am interested in the £1.6 billion of additional revenue, about which I have asked the Minister several times. Earlier this year, we heard from Ministers and Ministers in waiting about the tremendous fund of money that would help to soften the winds of austerity blowing from London.

Indeed, some parties claimed that they were solely responsible for providing that £1.6 billion. However, when one went to —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr D Bradley: Yes.

Mr Wilson: So that the Member does not lead himself even further into error, it is quite clear

that the additional revenue in the Budget is £900 million. I have said time and again that there are other revenue-raising measures that we are looking at. They have not been included in the Budget, and they will not be included until we are absolutely sure that they can be realised.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Minister for his intervention. Lead us not into temptation. I realise that he is trying to keep me on the straight and narrow, as difficult as that is. I will try to tread that narrow edge which is the road of righteousness.

The Minister told us that he had allocated £862 million of revenue. Is that new money, or is it money that is usually in the system? Is it money raised, for example, from the sale of Housing Executive properties or land, or money that has come back from the unfreezing of the rate? The Minister will probably update us on that. Out of the £1.6 billion that was postulated at the beginning, the remaining £738 million has still to be raised. I expect that that will be made up from the money that could potentially come from the Harbour Commissioners' reserves or the single-use plastic bags levy. All of that is potential; it has not yet been delivered.

As the Minister said, this Budget was the best possible Christmas present. Perhaps when we unpack it, however, there are not as many goodies as we were led to believe. I am loath to strike a critical note because the Minister will come back in his stand-up routine at the end of the day and describe me as the dark cloud. I do not think that I could deal with that today. In any case, I await the Minister's response.

Is there any new money in the package, or are we being sold a pup? I am sure that the Minister will be eager to clarify that. The Budget review group has often been mentioned as a body that will deliver on the new revenue. As far as I can see, however, that group has not delivered very much to date. Much is expected of it in the future, and I hope that it delivers. As the Chair of the Committee said earlier, the Budget settlement falls short of what we would like to implement all of the projects that need to be implemented.

Will the Minister confirm whether legislation is required to enable the Harbour Commissioners' reserves to be accessed? Will he tell us whether the Belfast Harbour Commissioners have been as helpful as they could be in dealing with that issue? Another question that I have

for the Minister is about the Scottish Futures Trust model. I believe that my colleague, the former Minister for Social Development, raised that model with the Minister. It has enabled the Scottish Government to borrow over £1 billion at low interest rates for capital projects, with annual interest payments being funded by the Government. However — this is crucial — it is off-balance-sheet; the borrowing has no impact on the London block grant. What is the Minister's view of that approach? Will he consider it and pursue it in the future?

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

2.00 pm

I would also like to hear the Minister's view on the Budget allocation for the social protection fund. Has any of that money been spent to date? What has been his response and that of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to the then Minister for Social Development's costed proposals for that money to go to people in mortgage stress and other financial stress? Is there any likelihood of any of the social protection fund being spent in this quarter or the next quarter? Given this week's motion on mortgage rescue and the evidence that lenders are now pushing repossession orders through the Enforcement of Judgments Office, does the Minister support money from the social protection fund going towards a form of mortgage relief scheme? Given that nothing from either the social inclusion fund or the social protection fund has been spent to date, can he give me any reassurances that moneys from either of those two funds might be spent any time during this financial year?

Does the Minister consider, as we in the SDLP do, that accelerated work should be undertaken on North/South health co-operation? With up to 40% of all money on this island being spent on health, is it not imperative that, where possible, we access co-operation, integration and a shared approach to health throughout the length and breadth of the island?

Those are only some questions. I could also refer to the £4 million that has been set aside for childcare, allocated to OFMDFM. Has a scheme been designed and an application progressed to allow childcare groups to access that money? Many of them are doing good work, and some of them are currently under huge financial pressures and need to access

that money in the shorter term, rather than the medium or longer term. I would appreciate it if the Minister were able to do anything to ensure that that matter is dealt with quickly.

My other colleagues will deal with specific departmental issues. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle as an deis labhartha seo a thabhairt domh inniu. Sin a bhfuil uaim.

Ms Lo: I will start by talking about the difficulties faced by the voluntary and community sector. Many Members will agree that that sector plays a vital role in providing services to our community. It is not only innovative but effective and efficient, and it offers value for money. Unfortunately, it is also the easy target for many Departments when cutting funding to the many projects that currently operate. In many ways, the recession calls for more services in the voluntary sector, rather than less. People are facing money problems and need financial advice. People have increased levels of stress because they are losing jobs and have less money, and they are more prone to mental health problems. There has also been an increase in the incidence of domestic violence because of the stress on families and the fact that people are losing jobs.

I am sure that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is aware that the voluntary sector has been in limbo for the past three months. Three months into the financial year, many organisations have not got their funding. They are really in limbo. Many organisations are still waiting for their letter of offer. Towards the end of March, many were told that they will get money, although they were not promised how much the cut might be. So, many organisations are forced to lay off staff, cut services or close the projects altogether. Many of the organisations that want to continue have to resort to using their own reserves, if they have the resources, or trying to move money around different projects to try to make ends meet. Many have also had to go to the banks for overdrafts, and we have to remember that the interest they pay on overdrafts cannot be recouped from the Departments.

I understand that some organisations have been told by staff in the Departments not to complain because, after all, they will get money. If Department heads or officials were to tell their staff that they would not be paid until the end of June, I am sure that they would hear a lot

of complaints from their staff, or the staff would all walk out of the offices. Being without pay for three months is unacceptable in any sector, but the voluntary sector is expected to get on with it when its staff do not get paid. I do not know how people can pay for their mortgages and cars and feed their children and families.

I will turn to OFMDFM. On Thursday of last week, the voluntary and community sector organisations that work with the ethnic minority communities were told that, at last, they will get money. That was last Thursday — the middle of June. However, they were then told that the money is committed only until September 2011. In many ways, that is crazy. People applied for a three-year funding stream, and they were told at the end of March that they will get money but were not told how much. Towards the end of June, they are told that they will get money only until September 2011. How can we call that a development fund? That is just a hand-to-mouth existence, and you cannot expect organisations, particularly those organisations that are helping newer communities to develop their strategic plan —

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member gave way. We all appreciate that people need to have opportunities for long-term planning, and one reason why we went for a four-year Budget was to enable Departments to have some certainty as to what resources they will have. The Member's point is very well put, but it is probably an issue for individual Departments, which now know what their four-year allocation will be, to give some certainty, even if it is to tell people the bad news early so that, as the Member pointed out, they can then decide what to do with staff. I am sure that the Member will agree that rationalisation might perhaps lead to better use of resources in some areas of the voluntary sector, which I think will have to happen.

Ms Lo: I absolutely agree with you, Minister. I just want to highlight OFMDFM's handling of this. The voluntary sector groups are under no illusion: they know that cuts are coming and are rationalising themselves and trying to be as efficient as they can be. We rely on many of those projects to provide front line services for our communities, and pulling the rug from under their feet like that is unacceptable.

I will turn to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). As party spokesperson

for culture, arts and leisure, I believe that it is wrong that DCAL is seen as a soft target for disproportionate cuts. That could prove to be a false economy in a number of respects.

The arts sector is badly hit. The sector is not just important in its own right; it has wider implications for the future of creative industries as a growth sector in the economy. The growth of that sector has been trumpeted by local political leaders. The encouragement of local talent is critical to the competitive edge in that regard.

The Alliance Party believes that investing capital in three separate stadia for soccer, rugby and Gaelic sports rather than in one shared stadium limits the opportunity for investment in other areas and limits opportunities to improve the accessibility of sports for all sections of the community. Minister, as you know, south Belfast has the Ulster Rugby ground. Increasing its capacity from 11,000 to 18,000 is incredible. It is in a residential area that already faces huge congestion and parking issues. To increase the capacity to that level is just unbelievable. Residents are up in arms and feel so disempowered.

Mr Humphrey: Where exactly would the Member site this new stadium that she proposes for all three codes?

Ms Lo: Well, the Maze would be an obvious choice for me, but that is up to the Executive. I am sure that you have been to the Ulster Rugby ground or have seen where it is. It is on a narrow street, both sides of which are chock-a-block with houses and, at the moment, it is already —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members to come back to the Budget issues.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I will turn, briefly, to the budget for the Department for Regional Development (DRD). I was a member of the Committee for Regional Development in the last mandate. In particular, I would like to highlight the imbalance between spending on roads and spending on public transport. The proportion of the original investment plan for roads was around 65% compared to 35% for public transport. However, with road investment being influenced by external capital sources, the figures are now more like 80% for roads compared to 20% for public transport.

Large capital spends on roads schemes at the expense of public transport serve only to push people back into their cars. They encourage long-distance commuting, which, in turn, has the potential to have a serious negative impact on our environment in the long term. If we persist in underfunding public transport, we will encourage people to continue to use their cars, and that does nothing to reduce congestion. It does not help us to lower our carbon emissions, and it leaves us at risk of being subject to EU infraction proceedings for not meeting targets. Further encouraging the use of private cars rather than public transport puts rural dwellers in fuel poverty, thanks to the high cost of travel. That may have a serious impact by restricting employment and recreational opportunities. If the percentage of the DRD budget spent on public transport were to be increased, we could meet emissions targets and seriously reduce the number of cars on the road. Do not forget that one full Ulsterbus equates to 52 cars.

We could increase the number of park-and-ride facilities, which have proved very successful, not least the Cairnshill park-and-ride on the Saintfield Road in my constituency. Such amenities have the potential to dramatically reduce the number of cars in Belfast and, therefore, seriously reduce congestion. *[Interruption.]* Yes, Minister.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I always love it when people start talking about reducing carbon emissions, using public transport and everything else. Given that there is a really good public transport system to Stormont from south Belfast, maybe the Member will tell us how she got here this morning.

2.15 pm

Ms Lo: Unfortunately, Minister, I do not live in south Belfast; I live in Jordanstown. It would probably take me two hours to come to Stormont using several buses or the train and the bus. If I had to go to my constituency office before I came here, that would add an extra half an hour.

Reductions in bus services and hours of operation, coupled with fare increases, create less and less demand for public transport and make our network look unsustainable. Investing in an effective and well-resourced public transport system encourages people to use the network, which creates a more successful and sustainable public transport network.

Mr Campbell: I support the proposition made by the Minister, as did other Members, not to open up a debate that was held elsewhere. I express surprise at the quality of debate here today.

Mr Wilson: Given the Member's ambiguous statement, will he tell us where he lies on the argument about the quality of debate in this place?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his question. He knows where I lie as I stand to my feet to describe the quality of the debate, which, hopefully, will be enhanced in the next couple of minutes. I want to raise a few matters —

Ms Ritchie: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, as long as it is quick.

Ms Ritchie: Will the Member confirm that he has spoken to the former Member of this fine august institution, the member for North Antrim, regarding this matter —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have to intervene and ask the Member to continue to speak about the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Mr Campbell: I turn first to education. Hopefully, the Minister, in conjunction with the Education Minister, will ensure that sufficient resources are in place, particularly on the capital side, to facilitate the development of schools, particularly in the north-west. The Finance Minister will be aware that I have spoken to him about schools issues there, as they affect boards of governors, parents and teachers, as well as pupils. Hopefully, that will be the case, as it is a matter that transcends the post-primary sector.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he share my disappointment that the former Minister of Education resolutely refused to give any indication of her priorities for capital spending, which, of course, have caused the very issues that he has mentioned, along with the disquiet, the unease and the uncertainty that lie around the schools estate budget?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister. It was regrettable that the previous Minister did not do that. That uncertainty has been compounded by the issues that I mentioned. Hopefully, we can bring some clarification on that over the next month or six weeks.

I also want to raise Department for Social Development (DSD) matters, as I serve on the

DSD Committee. The DSD Minister mentioned the issue of empty homes when he was before the Committee and on previous occasions, and it is a matter that can bring significant benefit to the community. We have between 35,000 and 40,000 empty homes that, were they brought into use, would significantly reduce waiting times and lists, particularly in the public sector, and would help to reduce antisocial behaviour in housing estates with boarded-up properties. So it is a significant development. The Social Development Minister takes the issue seriously, and he wants to address it. Hopefully, there will be resources to allow him to do so. As I said, there will be a number of benefits in doing that beyond the bringing into use of the homes themselves.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. The issue of housing is pertinent to my constituency, and it has to be tied in with building good community relations. Does the Member agree that there are void properties in some areas but people will not live together because of sectarianism, and the Assembly and Executive must address that as a matter of urgency?

Mr Campbell: Yes. I thank the Member for that intervention, and I agree with her. As we tackle vacant homes, we have to ensure that consideration is given to the fact that some areas have vacant homes that are derelict for the precise reason that she outlined. However, there are many other areas in which the reason is not related to sectarianism; it may be due to antisocial behaviour, such as drug taking, for instance. There has to be, therefore, a more widespread, holistic approach to trying to analyse the problems behind vacant homes. However, the point that I am making is that, as we do that, we can gain significant additional benefits beyond that of getting people into homes, which is, in itself, an important matter.

In the few minutes that I have before Question Time, I want to raise matters that I have raised in the past. It is hoped that the Minister will be able to help with the issue of employment patterns. A few weeks ago, I put down a question on the Housing Executive to the Minister for Social Development. I notice that, at long last, after many years — some would say decades — of the under-representation of the Protestant community in recruitment to the Housing Executive, there has been an improved picture for the first year in, I think, 20

years. That is good, and, hopefully, there will be sufficient resources in the Housing Executive budget to keep recruiting people so that it can address the problem that has been there for so long.

Over many years, a similar picture has emerged in the child maintenance and enforcement division. Just as there were protests, opposition and campaigns in the past because people felt that the Catholic community was disadvantaged, and people raised the issue and hammered on at it until it was eventually resolved, so there are those of us on these Benches who will do exactly the same. We will keep on year in, year out until we get equity for our community, no matter where in the public sector. Of course, that is a problem that I and others have raised on many occasions.

Finally, I want to refer to a similar issue in the Minister's bailiwick. On numerous occasions, we raised the problem of appointees to the general service grades of the Civil Service. In the past 10 or 12 years, there has been a significant under-representation of the Protestant community in that element of the public service. Those grades comprise some 20,000 people, unlike the Senior Civil Service grades that comprise some 300. Some people keep on about the Senior Civil Service grades, in which, of course, the Catholic under-representation is diminishing. On the other hand, the Protestant under-representation in the general service grades is not diminishing, and it must. We need to keep hammering on at that issue. Hopefully, the Minister will be able to respond, and we will be able to see some significant improvement for the entire community when we look at the Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I ask Members to take their ease until that time.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 9 has been withdrawn.

Farmers: Government Assistance

1. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to assist farmers who are struggling as a result of the economic downturn. (AQO 119/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My Department provides an extensive range of measures that enhance the economic position of farmers across the North. The most significant measure is the single farm payment, which is worth £270 million per annum. We strive to ensure that those moneys are paid out as quickly as possible, and we do all that we can to help farmers to get their claims right, thereby avoiding possible delays or reductions in their payments.

The rural development programme is also improving the economic performance of our agriculture industry through increasing competitiveness and improving sustainability, protecting our environment and improving the quality of life in rural areas.

Under axis 1, the farm modernisation programme helped over 3,500 farm businesses to modernise, with approximately £11 million of grant aid. I anticipate announcing an additional £4.1 million for a third tranche of the scheme later this year.

The agrienvironment measures of axis 2 are also very popular with farmers, and I expect to be able to admit approximately 2,300 farmers to the countryside management scheme this year. Over the past two years, the less-favoured area compensatory allowances scheme has injected £23 million per annum into disadvantaged areas, which is well in excess of the level that was originally planned.

Axis 3 of the rural development programme was allocated £20 million to support farm diversification, with up to £50,000 available per successful applicant.

Under the cross-sector advisory forum, the agriculture subgroup, which was chaired by my predecessor and included industry, banking, union and voluntary sector membership, made recommendations that were included in the Executive's priority measures for dealing with the economic downturn.

Apart from those measures, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) funds an extensive range of training courses for farmers, farm employees and family members, as well as a major research programme, which are all aimed at improving the economic position of local farmers.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answer. She outlined many avenues through which farmers can avail themselves of money, but part of the problem for the farming community is the bureaucratic difficulty. In your answer, you referred to easier payments for single farm payment, but, unfortunately, a small percentage of farmers suffer delays in the length of time from a farm inspection to receipt of payment. What will the Minister do to shorten that time to enable ease of payment to the farmer?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I understand that a small percentage of people have not yet been paid their single farm payment. Around £7 million still needs to be paid out, and I hope to have it paid out in the next five weeks. We are looking at measures that the Department can take to speed up payments and bring that forward as quickly as possible. I have instructed the Department to take a look at that, and, hopefully, I will be able to give the Member more detail in the future.

Mrs D Kelly: Is the Minister aware that many more people other than farm families live in the rural community, and that, in the previous mandate, £10 million was set aside in the Budget to tackle rural poverty in general? Will the Minister outline what will be done in this mandate to tackle the wider issue of rural poverty and the budget for that?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for the question. I have set aside £16 million in this Budget period for such measures. I am

reviewing measures from the previous four-year term around rural childcare, broadband provision and access to services. Obviously, the rural White Paper will have a key role to play in measures that I take forward, and I hope to be able in the future to give the Member more details of my priorities, which will be around promoting access to services and inclusion. Broadband is a particularly big issue for access to services for the rural community. Childcare priorities are also very important, and there are a number of other issues. If the Member has any ideas, I will be happy to listen to them.

Mr Beggs: The farming community is very critical about the quantities of paperwork and levels of bureaucracy. The Minister mentioned axis 3 of the rural development programme. Does she recognise the fact that many applicants have been put off after becoming frustrated with such bureaucracy and that systems need to be fit for purpose if people are going to use them?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for the question. As I said in an earlier answer, bureaucracy is a big problem, and it is flagged up with me quite frequently. I have instructed the Department to look again at all the bureaucracy and red tape, and I hope to be able to take forward a programme of work that will improve matters. In the previous mandate, some work was taken forward under the better regulation task force, and I hope that we can improve on that work and add to it.

Mr Murphy: The Minister will be aware that, as well as an uptake in grants and moneys available to farmers, the whole issue of training and enhancing skills is important to increasing productivity and output and giving people opportunities. Can she indicate what uptake there has been of provision that is offered by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I visited CAFRE's Greenmount and Loughry campuses and was impressed by what I saw. During the most recent financial year, there was uptake of over 13,000 enrolments to its wide range of industry training programmes. Those levels increase year on year. Obviously, we very much welcome that. More and more, young people are seeing careers in the agrifood industry. We must do what we can to encourage and promote that, because the agrifood sector

is growing. We hope to be able to create future employment in that sector.

Pork and Beef Producers

2. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to addressing the difficulties that might be faced by pork and beef producers if there is a shortage of grain in the future. (AQO 120/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: That is clearly a difficult issue for people who are involved in the intensive sectors, which rely on grain. I share their concerns. I am aware that, in the past few years, agriculture around the world has experienced a rapidly growing demand for grain and there has been a significant rise in prices. It is encouraging to note that Russia has announced that it will lift its grain export ban on 1 July. Although that is a move in the right direction, it is unlikely to have a major impact on the price of grain in the short term, given the overall supply-and-demand situation on the world market at present.

My Department supports the intensive sector in every way that it can. It will now consider carefully how it can help further should there be a grain shortage. I will ask staff in CAFRE to consider how its range of education and training programmes for producers and processors, which is already comprehensive, could be tailored to address that problem; for example, by modifying existing production systems or developing new ones for the intensive production sector. In addition, my Department's supply chain development branch will continue to work with its industry partners to consider how returns can be improved in the face of rising input costs.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the high price of grain, has the Minister had any discussion with banks in order to improve cash flow for farming communities?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. My Department has had discussions with banks on the rural development programme to encourage them to lend money to farmers. That is, obviously, a key issue. For the intensive sectors in particular, the price of grain has a major impact on their profit and what they can do. Anything that we can do to help those sectors and to try to stabilise the market is to be welcomed.

Mrs Overend: Given that Northern Ireland imports about 90% of its grain for the beef, pork and poultry sectors, does the Minister plan to seek financial support from the European Union?

Mrs O'Neill: I will take that point on board, go away, consider it and talk to my officials. It is not something that I have done to date. Obviously, as I said, we depend heavily on outside markets from which to import our grain because circumstances here do not allow us to grow our own. Therefore, a combination of factors is needed. We could look at the possibility of EU funding. We need to look seriously at investment in research if we are to be able to help ourselves in the future.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What aid is currently available?

Mrs O'Neill: Under tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme, financial support was provided towards the purchase of new items of plant machinery and equipment from a list of eligible items, a number of which would have been of interest to the intensive sector. Although tranche 2 is now closed, a third tranche is being prepared for delivery later in 2011. I will certainly give thought as to how that could help the sector further.

The manure efficiency technology scheme (METS) is also now closed. Its closing date was extended. It also offered suitable items for beef and pork producers. The Department's supply chain development programme, which is funded under axis 1 of the rural development programme, involves farmers and others in the investigation of supply chain issues and marketing models in Ireland, Britain and further afield.

My Department also supports the intensive sector in every way that it can. It deals with farmers individually in order to access areas of potential improvement in production efficiency on farms. A comprehensive range of education and training programmes is offered to enable producers and processors to develop further technical and business management skills. CAFRE staff also assist with product specification, product development and the adoption of new technology.

Agrifood

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to ensure that the agrifood sector will be a key growth area in the future. (AQO 121/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am grateful for this opportunity to restate my view about the important role that the future growth of the agrifood sector will play in the development of our economy. In fact, that was one of the key considerations for us when selecting Departments. The sector has performed strongly during the recent downturn, and it is well placed to exploit export opportunities on a global stage and to build economic recovery.

My Department's main financial mechanism to support the sector is the rural development programme, which includes the processing and marketing grant scheme and the supply chain development programme. Together, those schemes are worth over £23 million. We provide programmes of education, lifelong learning and technology transfer, while DARD-funded science and research programmes are vital for innovation. The Department is also responsible for the implementation of the common agricultural policy across the North of Ireland, which injects in the region of £300 million into the agriculture and rural economy each year.

Working in collaboration with others, such as Invest NI, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), I am sure that we can ensure the continued growth of the sector and, in doing so, strengthen our economy. Given the important role that the sector has to play in all our futures, the Executive need to take a strategic, long-term approach. To that end, I will work closely with others in the Executive on proposals for the future of the sector.

Mr McCarthy: I agree entirely with the Minister. The Minister will be aware of the excellent produce that comes from the Strangford constituency, including Comber spuds, Portavogie prawns, Glastry Farm ice cream and much more. The Minister mentioned various Departments, but what consideration has she given to promoting the agrifood sector through local councils in all areas of Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. You will be glad to hear that I had

Comber spuds from McKee's farm last week, and they were great. It is key that I work cross-departmentally. However, the Member makes a valid point about what councils can do to promote produce that comes from their area. We have a collective responsibility in that regard, and I am happy to look at it.

Mr Campbell: The Minister talked about the important role of the agrifood sector. In response to a previous question, she also talked about the growth in the number of people working in the agrifood sector. Can she outline the extent to which we have seen growth in the agrifood sector compared to our counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales?

Mrs O'Neill: The agriculture sector looks very favourable right across the board, no matter where you come from. In a recent economic report, agriculture was second only to manufacturing in growth terms. We welcome that very much and want to continue to build on it, but it will take a combination of research and investment and encouraging more people to get involved in agrifood and train for that line of work. It is very promising. I do not have statistics or figures for England, Scotland, Wales or anywhere else, but, if the Member wishes, I am happy to forward those to him.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her responses. Will the Minister outline her Department's strategy to reduce costs and create jobs in the sector?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, reducing costs in the sector is not just down to my Department; it is for the sector as well. I am always happy to work and support the sector. I know that I keep talking about it, but scientific research will be key to improvement. We can effect efficiency savings by doing things better and helping the sector to do things better. The farm modernisation programme, for example, helps farm families to invest in technology, moves things along quicker and reduces costs. Those are all positive things that are happening.

Agriculture: Bureaucracy

4. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the ways in which the bureaucratic burden on farmers could be reduced. (AQO 122/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I indicated previously, I have a keen interest in this area of work. Reducing

red tape can benefit both the industry and my Department. I want to build on the work done by my predecessor, which is being taken forward under the better regulation action plan. The new period of government that we have entered gives us the opportunity to look again at particular areas and listen to fresh ideas. That will ensure that nothing is left unchallenged and that our customers' concerns are addressed directly.

The industry has played its part up to now, but I want more engagement. A feedback facility is now available on my Department's website, which allows individual customers to let us know about specific areas of administrative burden that they would like to see challenged.

The feedback form allows for a constant channel of communication to be kept open between officials and individual customers. It is a simple, fast and inexpensive way of getting in touch with the Department, with an assurance that topics raised will be looked at from a simplification viewpoint and responded to by my Department's better regulation unit.

2.45 pm

I have also asked my officials to identify any additional areas in which we can collaborate further with other Departments to simplify the range of inspection processes for our customers. Any reduction in the number of required visits to businesses is to be welcomed, and that work will press for a simplification of different inspection services.

The industry is well aware of the tight restraints under which we are obliged to regulate, but there is always scope for making changes and improvements that customers will feel on the ground. I want to see more initiatives that will bring the Department closer to its customers and ensure that it is listening and responding to their needs.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat, a Aire, as an fhreagra sin. What other Departments could DARD co-ordinate inspections with?

Mrs O'Neill: My Department could perhaps work with the Department of the Environment, the Environment Agency and the Food Standards Agency. We need to further examine work in those areas. There is no point in officials from my Department and other Departments

conducting different tests when it may be possible for us to better co-ordinate that work, with the result that we can save money for all Departments and speed up processes around inspections. There is great potential, but it is something that we will need to work at with the other Departments.

Lord Morrow: There was an announcement recently that there will be a reduction in EU red tape, which will save United Kingdom firms that employ no more than 10 people something like £300 million a year. How does the Minister envisage that impacting on the farming community in Northern Ireland? What savings does she see the community being able to avail itself of?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have any figures with me on amounts of money that that will save, but any measure that reduces red tape is to be welcomed. The farming industry is calling out for it, and a lot of work was done on that issue by my Department during the previous mandate. We need to take the regulations set down by Europe very seriously and work within them, but anything that reduces bureaucracy is something that we should take forward. We will work within European restraints and look at what we can do to improve things in our own systems.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her response. Will the Minister provide us with some specific detail about the representations that have been made by her or her Department to the Westminster Government or the EU on the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape for farmers?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I have yet to meet my counterpart in England, but I have corresponded with him through the Department. I intend to meet him in the future, and this issue will be on the agenda of that meeting. I recently met Simon Coveney, my counterpart in the Twenty-six Counties. By meeting, we can share experiences, the work that is going on in our various Departments and ways in which we can best impact on our industries.

Mr Allister: The answer given by the Minister today could have been exactly the same answer that was given four years ago, and, in the interim, nothing has changed or improved. Specifically, what has her Department done

in response to the Davidson report on gold-plating?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. However, I do not agree with his assertion that nothing has improved. Things have improved, and, for example, the better regulation task force took forward a number of recommendations from the industry, and it was concerned with how the Department and the industry can work together to improve things. Therefore, it is wrong for the Member to say that things have not improved. Is there more room for improvement? Absolutely, but that will come in time, and I have instructed my officials to look at all the regulations and what we can do to improve things.

Rural White Paper

5. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the draft rural White Paper action plan. (AQO 123/11-15)

Rural White Paper: Healthcare

13. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the rural White Paper will improve the rights of rural dwellers, particularly in relation to healthcare. (AQO 131/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 13 together. The public consultation on the draft rural White Paper action plan closed on 13 June, and my officials will shortly begin engaging with other Departments to consider the outcome of the consultation.

The rural White Paper action plan is an Executive document that is aimed at improving the well-being of rural communities, and it contains specific commitments by all Departments across a wide range of rural issues and challenges. Those include issues relating to access to services, rural transport, the speed and quality of rural broadband, poverty and social exclusion, and tourism.

Rural areas face many challenges, particularly in relation to the growth of the rural economy and ensuring equity of access to key services for rural dwellers. Our resources are limited; therefore, we have to target them to ensure the maximum benefit for rural communities. The rural White Paper action plan shows that

the future of our rural communities is very important to the Executive and that we value the contribution of our rural areas to wider society. It also demonstrates that the Executive are committed to taking action to address the challenges facing rural areas and to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers. That includes a commitment by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to take account of the needs of rural communities in the implementation of health improvement and promotion strategies and to explore the impact of rurality, isolation and deprivation on health inequalities.

Healthcare is an important issue to us all, but access to good healthcare is a particular issue in rural areas, where people are more isolated. The Patient and Client Council's report 'Rural Voices Matter', which was launched on 7 June, clearly articulates the concerns that rural dwellers have about accessing healthcare. Some of the difficulties are multifaceted. In many cases, rural dwellers have to travel some distance, often with limited public transport provision, to access healthcare provision. Although my Department cannot single-handedly resolve all the challenges facing rural communities, I will work with my ministerial colleagues to ensure that rural people continue to have access to quality key services, including good healthcare.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for her answer and welcome the fact that her officials will shortly engage with those in other Departments. Now that the consultation is over, can she tell us what specific targets she looks forward to seeing emerge from it?

Mrs O'Neill: The consultation has closed, and a total of 26 responses were received. They include responses from a number of councils, environmental organisations and rural community representatives. Responses from the public consultation indicate a range of opinions on the vision for rural communities and the securing of commitments from other Departments. Our success in producing the first cross-cutting document for rural areas was commented on very favourably.

The views expressed indicate the need for more work to be done with other Departments to develop more specific and more measurable targets; clear linkages between priority policies and actions; and more focus on

sustainability and the environment. After this period, I will have to take the action plan back to the Executive to get a recommitment from all Ministers that they are on board and committed to taking it forward. Implementing this plan will take cross-departmental working and commitment from all Ministers in the Executive. It will be an Executive project, but my Department will be in the lead, and I want to monitor progress closely.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How will the rural White Paper action plan help ensure the sustainability of rural communities?

Mrs O'Neill: The rural White Paper action plan is the first to deal with a range of rural issues for which responsibility cuts across all Departments. The commitments made by Departments in the action plan demonstrate that the Executive have a commitment to ensuring that the particular needs of rural communities are addressed. I am committed to working with my ministerial colleagues to ensure that there is a focus on rural issues and challenges, and that a more integrated approach is adopted across Government in addressing issues that impact on the sustainability of rural communities. It is everybody's business to ensure that rural communities are sustainable for the long term.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister is more than aware that public transport in my constituency is not as good as people expect it to be. She knows that, as we represent the same constituency. Will the Minister assure the House, and the constituents of Mid Ulster, that she will work with other Ministers, especially the Regional Development Minister, to enhance transport for rural dwellers? That is especially important given the libraries that are up for closure and the difficulties that people have in getting back and forth to libraries.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I am very aware of the challenges faced by the people of Mid Ulster. The action plan identifies a number of different areas to be looked at, and transport is key to that. We need to see more joined-up transport services in rural areas and to use what is there more wisely. We need to be involved in developing local transport plans.

It is all well and good to have a bus service that runs from Coalisland to Dungannon, but if you cannot get from Brockagh to Coalisland, the

service is not accessible. Yes, I am committed to working with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and with any Minister who wants to work with me for the betterment of anyone who lives in a rural community. Transport is one of the key issues in the action paper.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí a thug sí go dtí seo. An bhféadfainn a fhiafraí di cad é a buiséad atá curtha i leataoibh ag a Roinn don tréimhse rialtais seo le haghaidh cur i bhfeidhm an Pháipéir Bháin ar ghnóthaí tuaithe?

What budget has the Minister's Department set aside for the implementation of the rural White Paper?

Mrs O'Neill: There is no separate budget set aside for delivering the actions contained in the rural White Paper. That is because the sponsoring Department for each action that has been noted will take responsibility for it. I assume that the cost of implementing all the measures was factored into each Department's budget when the commitment was made in the previous term of the Assembly.

E.coli: Imports

6. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the import restrictions imposed following the E.coli outbreak in Germany have had any impact on farmers. (AQO 124/11-15)

E.coli: Impact on Farmers

14. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what impact the recent outbreak of E.coli in Germany might have on farmers. (AQO 132/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, I will answer questions 6 and 14 together.

My Department's view, after engaging with industry key players, is that the import restrictions that followed the unprecedented crisis as a consequence of the outbreak of E.coli in Germany have had minimal impact on local farmers. I understand that the German authorities have indicated that the vehicle for infection is a mix of sprouted seeds from a market gardening business.

Views from the industry, including local salad producers, have been varied. One significant lettuce producer reported a drop in sales to retail multiples and noted that recent orders have shown marked fluctuations in comparison with historic data for lettuce and celery sales for this period. Others did not notice any change in salad orders and noted that recent cool weather and the lack of summer weather would normally lead to a downturn in salad sales. Local growers supplying fresh produce to small retail outlets have not noted any significant fall in salad sales. They said that it cannot be attributed to the poor weather conditions. So, opinions vary. My officials will keep the situation, and any potential effect on our producers, under review.

Mr G Robinson: When does the Minister propose to lift the restrictions that are in place because of bluetongue now that they have been lifted on the mainland?

Mrs O'Neill: The restrictions will be lifted from 5 July or 6 July; I would need to double-check. That applies here as well.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response to both questions. Are the Minister and the Department satisfied that we would be appropriately equipped to deal with such an outbreak were that to occur here?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. The Food Standards Agency is the competent authority for food safety and legislation, and would take the lead on food-poisoning outbreaks. However, my Department works closely with the Food Standards Agency and conducts primary production hygiene inspections on its behalf.

The EU food hygiene regulations in force since 1 January 2006 extended the farm-to-fork approach to food safety legislation. That applies to food businesses throughout the supply chain, including our farmers and growers. Farmers and growers need to follow good hygiene practice and manage their operations in a way that controls food safety problems. They must continue to comply with other legislation on, for example, veterinary medicines and pesticides.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister tell us what her Department is doing about biosecurity measures, given that, between 1 and 7 June, there were two instances of 34 cattle being imported from bluetongue zones in mainland Europe?

Mrs O'Neill: That is not relevant to the main question, but I am happy to take that up with the Member later. Biosecurity is very important to my Department and is something that we are very mindful of.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Primary Care Centres

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the work that is being undertaken by his Department to facilitate the delivery of health services through primary care centres, including general practitioner practices in Carrickmore and Fintona. (AQO 135/11-15)

Carrickfergus and Larne: Health Centres

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when new health and care centres are likely to be built in Carrickfergus and Larne. (AQO 136/11-15)

3.00 pm

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 2 and 3 together.

I have a major programme of capital projects that I want to progress within the constraints of the existing Budget 2010 allocation. I have asked the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to consider methods by which capital allocation could be supplemented. To date, a number of health and care centres have opened and are providing a range of services. I am keen to consider how we can develop that type of integrated service delivery to provide more care locally and reduce the pressure on our hospitals. The Department has completed a capital priorities review, which has proposed key projects to progress over the next four years. I am currently considering its recommendations.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. His emphasis is on capital

requirements. My question cited Carrickmore and Fintona, both of which have capital requirements for the future, but my focus is on services in the meantime. I ask the Minister to work in partnership with the Western Trust to consider the reinstatement of the minor ailments scheme, which allows patients to go directly to a pharmacy without having to go to a health centre for a prescription. Secondly, I ask the Minister to consider, as part of his chronic disease management arrangements, the introduction of a pulmonary rehabilitation service and a smoking cessation clinic in Carrickmore. Generally, those services would apply to other rural health centres.

I thank the Minister for his latitude and you for yours, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I hope that you got all your points in.

Mr Poots: It is somewhat ironic that I, as Minister, would like to do more for the Member's constituency than he wants to do himself. I am looking at how I can deliver the centres in Fintona and Carrickmore. I am not just looking at the services that are provided; I am looking at providing quality centres for people to work in. I have asked the SIB to assist me, because I am not happy with the budget that I have been given for the capital project roll-out. We need to deliver more, and I am looking at doing so innovatively.

It is important that we review the minor ailments scheme, because, far too often, people are encouraged to take free prescriptions when they would not normally do so, which means that pharmacists can get money for delivering that service. In this instance, you do not need a prescription for every ill.

Mr Beggs: The East Antrim constituency, which stretches from the glens to Jordanstown/Whiteabbey, does not have a minor injuries unit, never mind an acute hospital. Does the Minister recognise that the health centres at Taylors Avenue in Carrickfergus and Gloucester Avenue in Larne are lacking in certain areas and have maintenance problems and design issues? Does he understand that, if they were improved, fewer people would have to travel to Antrim Area Hospital for treatment and pressure would be taken off the hospital?

Mr Poots: Quite unusually and somewhat scarily, I agree with the Member. It is clear that

we can do considerably better. We need modern and well-equipped facilities for our hospital staff to deliver in and for local people to use. At this early point as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I have decided that the delivery of more services at a local level is critical. Primary care centres give us the opportunity to deliver a lot of those services at that level and mean that people do not have to attend A&E units.

On the flip side, many of the key services that people require will be provided at a regional level. Specialisms and expertise will probably be provided regionally, but we could do so much more to keep people out of A&E. A lot of the pre-meds for operations and so forth could be provided at primary care centres, which is why I am keen to look at how we can roll them out across the Province, as was the plan in 2006.

Mr Dunne: Congratulations to the Minister on his appointment. What capital budget does he have available for this financial year, 2011-12?

Mr Poots: In total, I have £851 million to spend: £260 million has already been committed to critical care and maternity at the Royal; £348 million is for ongoing expenditure, which involves maintaining existing services, equipment, vehicle replacement, drug stockpiles and information and communication technology (ICT); and the remaining £240 million is to address all the new investments that are required. So you can see that the budget is actually quite limited in overall spend over the next four years. It is critical that we introduce other sources of revenue and funding if we are to upgrade the health estate. I am totally committed to doing that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we move on, I know that the Minister was quite happy to answer that question, but I ask Members to make sure that, in future, their question is linked to the original question.

Allied Health Professions Strategy

4. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed allied health professions strategy and when it is expected to be issued for consultation. (AQO 137/11-15)

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. My Department is working with key stakeholders and has developed a draft strategy for allied

health professionals (AHP) in Northern Ireland. That strategy will provide a high-level road map for professionals in the statutory, voluntary, community and independent sectors over the next five years. It focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the AHP workforce and on how they can be delivered to facilitate the planning and delivery of the AHP practices that support the health and social well-being of the population of Northern Ireland. I expect to issue the document for public consultation before the end of this month.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer and wish him well for the future. I look forward to meeting him in Coleraine shortly. What steps is he taking to reduce the very significant waiting lists for people who require physiotherapy?

Mr Poots: Although I recognise that the number of people on waiting lists has improved over the past number of years, at 31 May, 3,629 people who had been waiting for nine weeks or longer since referral until commencing treatment were still waiting. That is a standard that we need to improve, and we will certainly ask questions about how we can further improve it. I think that there needs to be some change to how work is carried out in the AHP sector, and I want to look at how we use occupational therapists in particular and ensure that we make full use of occupational nurses and so forth. That may reduce some of the occupational therapists' workload and could speed the process up. For example, I know that people who are waiting for adaptations to make homes habitable have to wait far too long before that work happens.

Ms Gildernew: We welcome and look forward to the publication of the strategy. Given that this is very much a front line service, to what extent has the Minister looked at the excellent co-operation that exists in organisations such as Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) to see how we can improve services by working with counterparts across the border?

Mr Poots: I have indicated that I do not have a particular issue with working with counterparts across the border where qualitative health results come from such work. I think that the financial circumstances of health colleagues across the border is one of the issues that we have in working with them. Even from initial conversations that I have had, it would appear that there is limited ability to buy into services

that we might be able to provide for people south of the border, therefore making it much more difficult to develop anything on that front.

Mr D McIlveen: The Minister will no doubt be aware that, in Scotland, physiotherapy self-referral has freed up some savings. Will that be in our strategy?

Mr Poots: We are very well aware of the pilot schemes that have been in place in Scotland and England. We are taking a very close look at those pilot schemes with a view to applying them in Northern Ireland if they have a successful outcome.

Tooth Whitening

5. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether it is legal for individuals who are not registered as dentists to perform tooth-whitening procedures. (AQO 138/11-15)

Mr Poots: The practice of dentistry is regulated by the General Dental Council (GDC) under the Dentists Act 1984. It is the GDC's view that tooth whitening constitutes a practice of dentistry and should be carried out only by trained, registered and qualified dental professionals. The GDC defines the dental professionals who can carry out tooth whitening as dentists, dental hygienists or dental therapists working under the prescription of a dentist if they have the necessary additional skills. Anyone who performs tooth-whitening procedures and is not one of the dental professionals as defined above will be practising dentistry illegally.

Mr Weir: I, too, welcome the Minister to the podium. There has been a high level of criticism by dentists of the new dental regulatory system operated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). Have you been in contact with the RQIA to discuss the matter?

Mr Poots: I have met the RQIA over the range of work that it does, but we did focus for some time on this issue. There are fundamental problems with how the registration was being rolled out. In the first instance, it was being carried out to the same legislation as was required for private hospitals. That, in itself, is not a problem; that enabled things to happen. However, there were about 80 regulations within that, about only 15 of which applied to dentistry. There appeared to be a problem with dentists not knowing exactly which one should

and should not be in. Therefore, dentists were spending far too much time trying to identify which was which. I indicated to RQIA that that was not a satisfactory situation and that it should identify the areas that the dentist should respond to and provide templates so that we could smooth the system out.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. To avoid increasing the number of non-registered dentists, will the Minister look again at dental provision in County Fermanagh, where a recent survey from the Patient and Client Council indicated that only 37% of people rated the current provision as satisfactory?

Mr Poots: There has been a significant roll-out of dentistry across Northern Ireland through the Oasis project. It is not good for Northern Ireland and is, in fact, counterproductive not to have adequate numbers of NHS dentists, because the costs borne later by the Health Service in dealing with people who develop much greater problems that could have been addressed in the first instance are prohibitive. Therefore, it is in our interests to ensure that dentists are available to the public. However, I welcome the fact that many more dentists are available to the public than was the case a number of years ago, and some good work has been done by the Department on that front.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time. Will he say whether his Department has the power to look into the quantity, quality and benefit of tooth-whitening products?

Mr Poots: Tooth whitening is paid for by the individual clients of dentists, and it went through a considerable amount of European Union regulation. You can use the material only up to a particular volume and so forth. It is really a matter between dentists and their clients, and, if the client wishes to have it, then they can choose to buy it from the dentist. RQIA has its regulatory process to ensure that everything is carried out correctly. That is something that the Department and the House have agreed, and it will continue to be enforced.

Public Health Agency

6. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is committed to the retention of the Public Health Agency. (AQO 139/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the short period that I have been Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety I have already noted the impressive range of work carried out by the Public Health Agency. In the public sector, I remain in favour of clear, lean management and accountability structures. So, I want to take more time to consider how effectively the Public Health Agency works with other health and social care organisations.

I do not believe that, in the short term, further major significant structural upheaval will benefit the system. However, it must be clear that the important issue is our commitment to investing in a public health agenda and services rather than becoming too caught up in the structures through which the investments are delivered. I have already made clear my intention to allocate an increasing percentage of the overall health budget to public health over time and to work constructively with other Ministers on what, I believe, is a shared agenda to improve the health and well-being of our population and to tackle inequalities in health.

3.15 pm

Mrs Overend: Thank you very much for your answer. Does the Minister accept that, since its inception, the Public Health Agency has brought about a renewed and enhanced focus on public health and well-being?

Mr Poots: Yes I do. There has been much work of value carried out by the Public Health Agency, and there is much more to be done. That is why I wish to invest more money in public health awareness. A lot of that will not actually deliver for us within our budget period or within the next few years but is a generational thing. If we do not invest now, we will have a less healthy population than we should and a huge cost burden on future generations in relation to health. The work of the Public Health Agency is absolutely critical.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box in his new role. Will he confirm that he is committed to the retention of the A&E unit at the Mater Hospital in north Belfast?

Mr Poots: That is slightly off the topic of the Public Health Agency. Nonetheless, there appears to be a rumour that the A&E unit at the Mater Hospital is about to close. I want to dispel that rumour. We are looking at services right across Northern Ireland. People can speculate on what will remain

and what will change. There will be changes, but there should be no speculation about any particular facility at this point, because no decisions have been made at this point. The Mater Hospital provides a vital service in the city of Belfast to many thousands of people every year. It is an essential service that is being provided. Change would only happen in that instance if it were to clearly deliver significant benefits, and that may be difficult to demonstrate. Let us just take our time and see what happens when we carry out a review of our services at a clinical level and take things from there.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer and wish him well with his new portfolio. Minister, I welcome your commitment to investing in public health during your stewardship of this Ministry, but have you given any thought to the role that the community and voluntary sector plays in safeguarding and promoting good health among the public?

Mr Poots: It is absolutely critical, as we roll out RPA, that we work closely with communities. Community planning is one area in which the Department can work closely with local authorities and the local community in delivering on community planning. We have the commissioning groups, in which local GPs and pharmacists are involved. We need to ensure that we identify patient needs, and the community will play a key role in doing that.

DHSSPS: Public Services Training College

7. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will be in a position to confirm that his Department's input to the Desertcreat business case has been approved to allow the Department of Justice to submit the full business case to the Department of Finance and Personnel for consideration. (AQO 140/11-15)

Mr Poots: As a result of Budget 2010, the Executive committed the full capital funding for the project through the Department of Justice budget, thus removing the need for the consideration of affordability by my Department from a capital perspective. I have considered the affordability from a running cost perspective, and I can confirm that I am supportive of the project and that it remains affordable within my current revenue budget. The Department of Justice

has been informed, and my Department's input to the business case is, therefore, complete.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for once again delivering services that the previous Minister failed to deliver. Can the Minister detail what negative impact the decision that he has taken will have on the rest of his Department's budget? Will he also detail when he hopes that the doors on the new facility will open?

Mr Poots: We are looking at opening the new facility in early to mid-2015. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service will incur additional annual revenue consequences of around £185,000, which it can find within its own budget, in areas such as ICT and fleet. Holding back a project to the value of £140 million because of running costs of £185,000 a year would be foolishness of the highest order. It is not supported by my accounting officer, by the accounting officer in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service or by me; therefore, we are happy to work with our colleagues in the Department of Justice in ensuring that that project can now go ahead without any further delay. As I said, we hope to have the facility up and running by 2015, so that our fire officers will no longer have to travel to England for training that they can receive in mid-Ulster.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for his clarification of this matter. However, there is one thing that I did not pick up. What was the total financial commitment to the running costs, and what is the purpose of that commitment?

Mr Poots: Our total commitment to the running costs will be around £3,600 million — or, rather, £3,600,000; the former figure would be a bit much. The money will largely be spent on training fire officers to the highest specification. Currently, we cannot do that in Northern Ireland. We have to allow fire officers to travel across to GB for the appropriate training. The new facility will stop that practice and will provide a more efficient service and better-trained fire officers. All in all, it is a sound investment in the Fire and Rescue Service in the interests of public safety. I welcome the opportunity to move the matter forward.

DHSSPS: Current Funding

8. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he intends to close his Department's current funding gap of £150 million. (AQO 141/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have asked for information on all realistic and deliverable options for cost savings in all aspects of my Department's work. It is a matter of urgency that I am able to make informed decisions on the issue. My first consideration will be to ensure that we sustain the best possible service to the public. I want to secure as much as possible from further genuine efficiencies and from service changes that have a positive effect on quality of service. I welcome the assistance that performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) will provide in carrying out that task. It will include benchmarking some current in-house services against alternative providers to establish whether the same or better quality can be secured at a lower cost. At this stage, I cannot rule out the possible need for some additional charges or other policy changes, but I am determined to do all that it is reasonably possible to do to minimise any future requests for additional resources from DFP.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the Minister to his new role. We will miss the occasional little spats that we had with him when he was Minister of the Environment. He has not really answered the question about the £150 million, although he indicated that additional charges might occur. Did he learn anything from his trip to Antrim Area Hospital last week that may help him to close the gap?

Mr Poots: I am not sure whether I learned anything from the trip to Antrim to help me to close the gap. I learned that a lot of staff members are working under significant pressure to provide a service to the public who use that hospital. A lot of credit goes to those staff members, who provide that service daily. We are committing an additional £13 million to Antrim Area Hospital to provide a better facility for those excellent staff to work in.

One of the problems that I have is that we are now three months into the financial year. For whatever reason, knowing the budget that he had, the previous Minister decided that he would not allow his staff to identify how they would save money. Money could have been saved in this financial year, but we got started on that challenge only when I took up office. We are looking at pharmacy efficiencies — the use of generic drugs — to save around £30 million; efficiency savings from the smaller arm's-length bodies and the Department of £32 million; cost pressure rescheduling of £10 million; and £13 million from Agenda for Change accrual. We will

look at other one-off measures that will not have a read-across to future years. Although I am confident that we can deliver in this financial year, next year poses a greater challenge. There is work to be done, and we need to get down to it. Since I came into office, my staff have got down to it.

Mr Campbell: I also congratulate the Minister on his appointment, and I thank him for the decision that he took at a very early stage in his tenure on the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, which, when completed, will benefit people in the north-west. Will he confirm that, contrary to rumours and speculation at the time, the decision will not impact adversely on the Department's funding regime?

Mr Poots: I will certainly confirm that, because capital funding for the project was set aside. The issue was with recurrent expenditure. When people with cancer come to a doctor, the response is to treat it. Irrespective of whether treatment is carried out at Altnagelvin Hospital or Belfast City Hospital, there is a growing demand for that type of service, and, therefore, we need to meet that demand. If cancer were not to be a priority in the Health Service, something would be fundamentally wrong. While I am Health Minister, it will always be a priority.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister reassure us that, in his efforts to close the funding gap, front line services, particularly domiciliary care, will not be adversely affected?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. Ensuring that front line services are not affected as a result of the financial pressures that we are under is certainly very high on our agenda. The more we can provide care in the community, the better will be our prospects of meeting budgets in future years. Therefore, to me, withdrawing funding from domiciliary care is not a particularly wise investment. It is much more cost-effective to keep people in their own home than in a nursing home or, worse still, a hospital. Furthermore, it is much better for individuals to stay in their own home. Where possible, it is most people's choice, so let us ensure that we have service levels that allow people to choose to stay in their own home and, given their circumstances, to have a reasonable quality of life.

Cervical Cancer: Screening

9. **Mrs Lewis** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to encourage more women to participate in screening programmes for cervical cancer. (AQO 142/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland cervical screening programme is offered to all women aged 25 to 64. Currently, 76·8% of women attend their cervical screening appointments. In 2000, the uptake rate was 69·3%. The Public Health Agency has undertaken a range of initiatives to promote cancer screening and improve uptake. Recent measures include update training sessions for 300 health professionals in March 2011; the publication of new information leaflets in January 2011; and press releases at key times of the year, such as during Cervical Cancer Prevention Week. The agency is undertaking work to explore inequalities in the uptake of cancer screening programmes and to determine how those inequalities can be addressed. My Department will continue to work with the agency, the voluntary sector and other stakeholders to increase participation in the cervical screening programme.

Mrs Lewis: I, too, welcome the Minister to his new role. What is his assessment of the significance of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: It is significant, particularly for people diagnosed with it. On average, 80 women a year are diagnosed with cervical cancer, more than half of whom never had a cervical smear or did not attend regularly for screening. There are 20 to 30 deaths per annum from cervical cancer in Northern Ireland.

All credit must go to the Public Health Agency for increasing the uptake rate from 69·3% to 76·8%, but, if we could drive that rate up further, I have no doubt that the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer would fall considerably below 80. As a result, the number of women who die from it would be driven down as well.

Ms Ritchie: Will the availability of tests for human papillomavirus (HPV), which is associated with cervical cancer, increase? Will the Minister outline the cost benefits of such testing and its benefit to patients?

Mr Poots: First, we have the immunisation programme for HPV, for which there has been good uptake among the young population. That is good news. For example, in 2008-09, the uptake in year 9 schoolchildren was 90%. I believe that that will deliver real and significant benefits in future years.

3.30 pm

It was announced that, from April 2011, the cervical screening programme in England would incorporate HPV testing. The HPV test is done to identify whether a high-risk type of HPV is present. In women, high-risk types of HPV cause changes in the cells of the cervix, which can be seen as abnormal changes in a cervical smear test. In all of that, we will watch what is happening in England and identify the success of it. It may be something that we will give consideration to doing in due course.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware that the Western Health and Social Care Trust is carrying out a pilot to test for HPV? Will he consider rolling out similar projects in other trusts throughout the Six Counties?

Mr Poots: If the pilot is successful, we will consider rolling it out across Northern Ireland. If there are real benefits to be had, that is something that we want to develop. It is better to treat people and prevent them from getting cancer than have to deal with the problem after it happens.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] be agreed. — [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Wilson).]

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am very glad to be here to participate in the Budget debate. The vast majority of discussions that are taking place on the future economic success of this part of Ireland lie around the possible devolution of corporation tax-setting powers and a possible reduction in such rates of tax. However, what has often been missing from the debate has been the potential for other factors that will grow our economy substantially. The future success of our economy lies with the people who live here — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flanagan: — and the people who have not yet been born here. If corporation tax were to be cut, we could not realistically expect huge multinational companies to redirect all of their operations here and, with it, secure the long-term economic prosperity of this part of Ireland. We need to ensure that small and medium-sized businesses that are already in operation are given the full support that they deserve. We need to ensure that people who are interested in starting their own businesses are given financial and practical support. That is particularly important in disadvantaged communities and among our young people.

In such disadvantaged communities, rates of unemployment and emigration are very high. Emigration is a problem that has once again returned to these shores. In the South, up to 1,000 people are leaving every week. Comparable figures for the North are unavailable. It is for that reason that I welcome the inclusion in the Budget of some £19 million for a short-term employment measure. The measure will provide grants to young people and people who live in neighbourhood renewal areas. We also need to look at how the social investment fund can be best used to create jobs in disadvantaged areas.

We need to ensure that adequate support is provided to companies to enable research

and development and to encourage export-led companies. There is, however, an ongoing concern about the failure of the British Government to face up to their obligations from St Andrews to inject some £18 billion over 10 years, which would help to grow our economy and create much-needed jobs. Without that investment for infrastructural projects, many additional and much-needed projects across a wide range of Departments will not be able to proceed, and there will be serious consequences for our society as a whole.

I place on record my disgust at the awarding to an Australian company of a contract to drill for natural gas in west Fermanagh using the very controversial method known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. There are potentially trillions of cubic feet of natural gas buried deep in Fermanagh's floorboards. Fracking has the potential to have a serious impact on Fermanagh's environment as a whole.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. You need to remember that this debate is on the Budget (No. 2) Bill. Although there are issues of funding around it, we are primarily talking about the Budget.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is part of my contribution to the Budget debate. If you allow me a little bit of latitude, I will return. There are serious —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I will not allow latitude in relation to the Budget debate. The Budget debate is about the Budget, not about other issues that may affect constituencies in various different ways.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat. An awful lot of natural gas will come from that controversial method. However, there will be no economic or financial benefit for the area as any tax gathered will head straight to London, even though the people here will pay the social price of such a decision. That ridiculous situation needs to be looked at again, and it needs to be done quickly and independently and by experts.

Like much of west Fermanagh, huge areas across the North cannot access mobile phone coverage or a broadband connection of any kind. I am hopeful that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) will put in place further measures to address that disgraceful situation. The lack of telecommunications provision is having a huge impact on the economic viability of many rural areas. Farming

and non-farming families alike are affected. It is also adding to the abandonment of our rural areas by young people and is having a huge impact on students who are trying to get a decent education.

Measures also need to be put in place to tackle fuel poverty and to maximise the benefits to our struggling tourism sector of Rory McIlroy's victory in the US Open. As we all know, Rory is the touring professional at the Lough Erne Resort in Enniskillen, and he proudly bears its logo on his collar. That has huge potential for the tourism sector, and we need to seize the opportunity immediately.

I have mentioned briefly aspects that impact on the education sector. It is clear that the education system as a whole faces enormous difficulties, particularly in years 2, 3 and 4 of the budgetary period. The Executive need to work positively and constructively with the Department of Education to deal with those challenges.

Movement on the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is needed to reduce the impact of reductions in the block grant. The existing system of delivering education in this state is completely out of date. We are now in the twenty-first century and are trying to work within a system that was not fit for purpose in the twentieth century. I look forward with hope to political consensus and movement on an ESA Bill. Without movement on the ESA, we may be unable to find the necessary savings in administration and bureaucracy. Five million pounds needs to be taken from the annual cost of providing transport without impacting on the service that we provide. We need to find savings in how procurement projects are taken forward without there being a further reduction in our capital projects. Such savings can be made only through the creation of a single education body.

We also need to look maturely at how money is put into the education system and assess properly the challenges that lie ahead in the sector. It is clear that the Minister of Education has a difficult time ahead, and many will not envy the task that he now faces.

Mr Humphrey: Does the Member agree that having five systems of education in this country is ridiculous?

Mr Flanagan: Of course I agree, but there are more than five —

To clarify, did you say five systems or five boards?

Mr Humphrey: I was referring to the fact that there are five types of education in Northern Ireland, including Irish-medium schools.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for clarifying that. Of course, the fewer the systems, the less the cost will be. However, we must acknowledge that parental choice plays an important role in how we deliver our education system. There is an onus on the Assembly and the Executive to enable parental choice, and we need to ensure that we all press forward with the needs of the child at the heart of everything that we do.

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Bill as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and as a Member for East Londonderry. I congratulate the Finance Minister on his reappointment to that position, and I thank the people of East Londonderry for investing their trust in me once again at the polls in May.

The Bill will see the transfer of the remaining moneys until the end of the financial year in April 2012 to Departments and associated agencies. The Bill is necessary as it grants the Minister of Finance and Personnel the authority to do that. Without the Bill's approval, the Departments and all other agencies would not be able to function and would essentially grind to a halt. The next few years will present challenges after the publication of the Tory/ Liberal Democrat comprehensive spending review, which cut some £4 billion from the block grant, not to mention the 40% cut to our capital expenditure budget. That has severely limited the ability of our Government to build new roads, hospitals and schools.

I want our Government to continue to focus on rebuilding the economy, creating jobs and preparing future generations and those out of work for the future economy. Thanks to our able Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, billions of pounds have been generated from investment in local businesses through Invest NI. That must continue, and, in addition, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) must work together to invest in children and young people.

We also need to capitalise on tourism. I represent one of the most beautiful parts of Northern Ireland, where tourism has been vital to development and, in many ways, central

to the local economy. We have hundreds of bed and breakfasts, several hotels, and many catering cottages and apartments. I want my constituency, and Northern Ireland as a whole, to get the most out of tourism, which offers long-term benefits as tourists spend money and contribute to our economy.

Next year will mark the centenaries of the Titanic and the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant. The Titanic marks a sad period in our history but also a time when Ulster was the industrial world's powerhouse and when Belfast served as the busiest port in the UK. We were also strong when it came to championing engineering and linen, and we can learn much from that period in our history. One hundred years on, we must work to market those two events as that offers a chance to tell the world that Northern Ireland is open for business and is no longer marred by the violence and terrorism that was once inflicted upon our people.

As a member of the Policing Board, I want to see work to ensure that the PSNI receives the funding and resources that it needs to fight the terrorism that continues to blight our Province. That is important, first, for the economy, for all the reasons I have pointed out and, secondly, to ensure that peace and democracy prevails.

Mr McNarry: I begin by giving a genuine welcome to Mr Wilson on his reappointment to his position. It appears that he maybe has two more years to improve the standard of debate in this place to meet his colleague's requirements. I look forward to seeing him do that in those two years.

I know that you are a bit strict about wandering away from the subject, but there is little point today in pushing against a done deal that was agreed in the previous mandate and has been carried into the new mandate. Perhaps on another day when the consequences become clearer and the anticipated painful evidence gathers to expose the Executive's poor Budget package proposals for the next four years, I could then comment.

However, I wish to talk about how the Budget proposals will impact on the delivery of our education service. Undoubtedly, the Finance Minister is managing what is a seriously difficult budgetary situation with multiple difficult choices, which, in more normal circumstances, we would prefer not to have to make and which have become priorities in a scale of one to

three because we no longer have the luxury of prioritising choices in a scale of one to 10. One of those priorities impacts on education, which underpins critical areas such as workforce qualifications and employability, both of which are crucial to our whole economic strategy.

We in here and the pupils, parents and teachers out there all know that surviving with a £300 million shortfall over the next four years will force unpalatable choices and make prioritising an accomplished skill for all financial managers. However, I worry about the ease with which I now hear people in the education authorities who should know better adopting a nonchalant shrug of the shoulder and a “can’t do” attitude towards money as if it now sounds a better excuse than “can do”, “let’s have a go” or “let’s do it”. On three occasions at Committee, I have heard three different issues being subjected to the official line of, “we may not have the resources”, “we do not have the resources” and “we will not have the resources”. It cannot be an acceptable response from officials across the board to use money or the lack of it as an excuse for failing to implement an expected priority. We here cannot stand over a ducking-and-diving mentality when priorities are at risk and when we should know what those priorities are to be. I urge the Finance Minister to ensure that Departments not only control spending but understand the priorities and do not resist them.

I wish Mr Wilson well in monitoring the overspend, which, predictably, I suspect that some Departments are already finding inescapable pressures in dealing with. That having been said, and I say this reluctantly, I cannot see any other avenue but overspend in education if the delivery and the high expectation of customer requirements are to be realised.

3.45 pm

I suspect that this Budget will be reinvented annually for the next four years. It will present education with its greatest ever test. When it comes to it, economic selection will be of far greater importance than falling out over academic selection. With this Budget, we have a situation that could stretch education to the limit of breaking point, structurally and financially. What begins as efficiency cuts become structural cuts — structural cuts that will undermine important and central aspects of a policy. Let us look at making it money well spent, value for money that is put to good use.

Let us dispense if we can, and I hope that we can, with the premature excuses that I hear now. Let us not be sucked into the “pressures on resources” preconditioning that is already going on.

Investment in education produces big returns that are far greater than the amount of money invested. Those returns can be measured in hard monetary and numeric terms, not just in the equally crucial broad quality of life successes. I say to the Finance Minister: with this alleged four-year Budget, we do not have a spreadsheet that can get even close to servicing our education needs as they are priorities. Let me make it clear that we must protect precisely those services that I contend are at risk as a result of the Budget.

It is no secret — the Minister knows it well — that I have previously reacted to and voted against these Budget proposals, but not today. Today, I am advising of my emerging concerns as I get to grips with my new responsibilities in education. As I said, the Budget deal is done. However, the ramifications of it have yet to unravel to further weaken our economy and pin back the delivery of a first class education service. Therefore, I expect the Education Minister to press the Finance Minister and his Executive colleagues hard on the case for financial educational easement. I say “expect” at this stage, because I trust that the need to demand will activate itself quickly once the new Education Minister realises what I am pointing out to him: that this Budget, which his party voted for, means school closures, job losses and school transport cutbacks. Those issues and others will demand solutions for which we will require immediate assistance.

I would prefer that we all learn to accept the wisdom, prudence and lessons in financial investment in education that others have benefited from. Look at research from the United States, where the Perry preschool project tracked children from the 1960s through to the age of 40. That showed that there was a £7 return on every £1 invested. More US research, this time from Harvard University, demonstrates that children who benefit from early years education will earn more, contribute more in taxes, enjoy better health, be less of a burden to the Health Service and make better provision for their own retirement.

I am sure that, as a former teacher, the Finance Minister will be sensitive to my next point. When you cut a school budget, you have to realise that over 80% of that school budget is spent on staffing costs. There is far less flexibility in school budgets than those dealt with in the normal spending Departments. The cuts in the school budget will be 3% to 5% a year over the next four years, and they will impact directly and immediately on jobs. There is no escaping that. What is more, they will impact directly on staff:student ratios and class sizes, which have been identified by educational research bodies, such as the Sutton Trust, as one of the major factors in improving quality of education and academic results. That, in turn, will impact directly on the ability of schools to deliver the Department of Education's own policies of the revised curriculum and entitlement framework and driving up standards in literacy and numeracy.

We know that delivery will be a challenge to all Departments, and none more so than the Department of Education. I trust that the House will resolve to meet the challenges confronting education in a manner that casts aside lamentable lame excuses by putting the education of children today and in the future forward in a way that is not confused or compromised by short-term economic necessity. I understand the Minister's difficulties, and I sincerely hope that his calculations are correct. I ask that education does not fail children due to poor financial management or poor financial calculations because some are adopting a mentality of less will do and, overall, education cannot afford a £300 million shortfall. I am confident that the Finance Minister and the Minister of Education are competent to wrestle with that £300 million shortfall.

I hear murmurs, as I heard during the last four-year mandate, that where there are great needs we will find a way. I heard the Finance Minister allude to such things today, and I hope that he is right. However, I hope that, whatever we find, we find it on the back of policies that the House can agree and support as one and that those priorities will drive us to unite together to support the management that the Finance Minister will try ably to bring through during the next two years that he will be in office and also to support the Education Minister. It is for those children that I make my request.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As Chair of the

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I advise the House that the Committee met the Minister on 8 June, when it explored some of the challenges facing the Health Department regarding the 2011-12 Budget. The Minister told the Committee that he was facing a shortfall of around £177 million and that he was examining his options to bridge that gap. In order to get into the detail of the Department's finances, the Committee invited senior officials to its most recent meeting. Unfortunately, the officials were rather thin on the detail, and the Committee was left no further on as regards the cash saving options that the Department is seriously considering. Therefore, we have invited the officials to come back on 29 June with precise and up-to-date information, so that we can engage in in-depth debate. After all, that is the role of the Committee, but it needs to be in possession of the full facts if it is to be able to usefully assist and advise the Department.

The Committee will be exploring a number of key areas with the Department. For example, we have been told that the Health and Social Care Board is planning to apply some constraints to services that would, in a normal context, have been subject to prior ministerial approval. The Committee wants to find out what those services are and whether the constraints have been applied yet. Similarly, we understand that trusts are proposing certain actions to contain costs in this financial year. Again, we want to know what those actions are and what their impact will be.

The Department advised the Committee of high-level changes that could contribute to resolving the budget gap for 2011-12. One such change is cash-releasing efficiency measures. However, the Committee needs to know what that means, and it has requested a list of all such measures being considered and their associated cash saving. Another change is the reduction in the scope of services offered to the public. We want to know what services are being considered under that heading, how much they will save, and what areas they are in. Again, we have requested that information from the Department.

The Department also informed the Committee that £32 million of efficiency savings could be made from smaller arm's-length bodies. We would like to know which arm's-length bodies

are involved and the specific area of spend from which those savings could be made.

We realise and appreciate that some changes are more difficult to make than others and that there are short, medium and long-term savings to be made. The Committee, therefore, has asked for a list of options for cash saving categorised according to the period in which they could be realised and whether they require a policy or legislative change. In particular, we need to know more about the options that would release cash within 2011-12 and not require any change to legislation, as we see those as being quick wins for the Department.

One such quick win, which was the subject of considerable discussion and debate at our last Health Committee meeting, was the prescribing of generic drugs and making such prescribing mandatory. We discussed that at considerable length with departmental officials, and members were very frustrated by the officials' insistence that it was a complex matter. We have, therefore, asked the Department to produce a paper detailing the obstacles and complexities of introducing a policy to make the prescribing of generic drugs mandatory for the primary and acute sectors and clarifying whether it would require a change to the legislation. The Castlederg example seems to suggest that it could be done relatively easily and could release substantial cash efficiencies for this year.

Officials mentioned the possibility of no longer providing services whose efficacy has no firm evidence base, and we requested a list of the services being considered within that category. I am concerned that new therapies or counselling services might fall within that category. I would be perturbed and concerned if they did, because we have to remember that drug companies, when evaluating their drugs, have a vested interest in proving that they work. We must also remember that the Health Department is trying to move away the culture of a pill for every ill. As much good work that might fall into that category is being done, we requested that list from the Department and will give it full scrutiny.

In conclusion, I reiterate a point that the Committee made to the Minister. We are here to listen and engage constructively with him. We understand that difficult decisions will have to be made in this budgetary period, and, as a Committee, we wish to offer any advice and help that we can to the Department. However,

to do so, we need to be in possession of all the relevant information, and we are hopeful of a more productive relationship with the Department. We will wait and see. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr P Ramsey: I will raise some issues as the SDLP's employment and learning spokesperson and a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning. We are concerned about a number of areas, particularly the proposed reduction in the Department for Employment and Learning's budget. How can we expect the Department and the Minister to reflect the need for the services that the former is expected to provide with such a serious decrease in its financial resources? From the Budget, we get the idea that the business community will be expected to fund adult apprenticeships. At the same time, however, we know that businesses throughout the region are facing unprecedented hardship, and many are struggling to keep their heads above water.

One provider of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme helps to upskill the labour force of my constituency in Foyle. That provider has achieved great success rates and currently has 208 people involved in an apprenticeship programme. None of its participants are out of work. That should be supported. A programme that keeps people in work and allows them to widen their skills base to support the necessary economic recovery should be encouraged. We should not, as the budgetary allocation presses us to do, cut the lifeline of so many in my constituency of Foyle and beyond who rely on those providers and the wider programme to help them get into the labour market.

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

The Department is attempting to formulate a new adult apprenticeship funding plan that must correlate to its allocation. It is imperative now, as it was when the Budget was first brought to the House, that we as an Assembly support economic growth through such programmes as ApprenticeshipsNI. They give the workforce more confidence and enable businesses to compete much more effectively by having people with those skills that readily need prioritising.

4.00 pm

I will move on to the issue of student finance, in particular, the education maintenance allowance (EMA). The Minister has a number of options

available to him, many of which would mean a reduced spend from the Department on EMA. The financial impact of the Budget and the subsequent moneys available will hit that area hard. Furthermore, student fees — always a topical issue and one that we will be discussing next week — remain a huge issue for higher education institutions and potential students. As well as being directly affected by the annually managed expenditure allocated, the Department will also be adversely affected by the reduced overall departmental allocation through the Supply resolution that the Minister provided last week. Granted, the Employment and Learning Minister is working on the proposals available to him, and I know that he intends to bring an options paper to the Executive some time over the summer recess. I do not want to presuppose what he or the Executive intend to do, but we should place on record our position. The SDLP's position is very clear: we are against any rise in student fees.

I want to look carefully at the university sector across Northern Ireland. There is confusion and uncertainty and, even before the impact of the £40 million black hole in the DEL budget — that is what we are talking about — the impact of the existing £28 million efficiency savings at Queen's and the University of Ulster. That sustained underinvestment in Northern Ireland's higher education sector will, no doubt, result in a second-rate, non-competitive university system, not the vision set out in the future of higher education strategy that the Department is looking at.

I want to identify some of the areas —

Mr Wilson: The Member says that the DEL budget is under pressure, that he does not want to raise student fees, that he is concerned about sustained underinvestment in higher education and that cuts are already being made in universities. Where does that leave his party's position? In its response to the Budget, his party suggested that another £20 million a year could be taken from universities.

Mr P Ramsey: Minister, we will vote against any rise in student fees, as you did in Westminster. I sincerely hope that you take the same position. I want to give you a clear indication of our party's concerns about higher education and the impact of that £40 million. We need the Executive to make a firm commitment to higher education across Northern Ireland by

ensuring that that £40 million is covered. If that does not happen, the consequences for higher education in Northern Ireland will be dire. We will see the closure of academic departments, the reduced recruitment and retention of world-class staff and reduced student:staff ratios and contact hours. We will see a reduction in student support services, which are hugely important in encouraging people from different socio-economic groups to participate in third-level education; we will see restrictions on the availability of core facilities such as libraries, which are so important, and university sport and play provision.

Over recent years, there has been a huge increase in the demand for university places in Northern Ireland. We talk about widening access and participation for communities across Northern Ireland. We do not want only those with the highest grades to have access to Queen's and the University of Ulster. There will be so much pressure on families and young people, who may now see a barrier in going to England because of the high fees of £9,000. I have every confidence that our Executive will make the wise decision to ensure that that £40 million is clearly covered in the circumstances.

The significant changes presented to the Department will be compounded by the allocation that we are now asked to approve. I said in the debate before the elections and I say it again now: there is little joined-up thinking in how priorities have been given to DEL to manage. We are asked to believe that cutting positive measures, such as the apprenticeship programme, and simply waiting for people to become unemployed and allowing the employment service to cope with an increased demand is, in some way, going to be effective. It is not.

The Minister and the Executive face many challenges in preparing a new Programme for Government. The SDLP will continue to support the Departments and the Executive when we think that they are making the correct decisions, but let me make it clear: we simply will not support any measures brought forward through the Budget that we see as detrimental to growth, to the labour market and to job creation.

Mr Humphrey: I will begin by congratulating the Finance Minister on his reappointment. It seems that the 'Belfast Telegraph' campaign has won through. I wish him well in his deliberations over

the next number of years. I also congratulate him on the Budget that he has brought before the House in what is an extremely difficult period for this United Kingdom, given the Tory/ Lib Dem cuts. In my view, he has rightly sought to protect front line services, to reduce waste and inefficiency and to support economic activity. At the same time, he has addressed the longer term objective of rebalancing Northern Ireland's economy away from its present dependence on the public sector.

It is impossible to speak on this topic without mentioning the very challenging context in which we are operating. While it is encouraging that the wider United Kingdom economy has returned to economic growth, it is extremely worrying that Northern Ireland as a UK region is lagging behind the country as a whole. The continuing growth in Northern Ireland's unemployment figures — an increase of 6.5% in the past 12 months — which is reflective of a marked decline in our output of service industries and construction, is alarming, and I am sure that the Minister and his Executive colleagues will work hard to address that over the next year.

The shrinkage in services and in construction particularly concern me as a representative for North Belfast because my constituency includes many people who are on low incomes or who are unemployed. Those who are employed are likely to work in the services and/or the construction industry, which traditionally offered the greatest opportunity for people without work to find meaningful employment.

There are a couple of issues that I think are important in that regard, and I will bring them to the attention of the Minister and the Assembly. Members on all sides of the House will be aware of building sites, particularly residential developments, in their constituencies, which started in earnest a couple of years ago, but are now standing largely idle and abandoned, as their developers have gone bust or have had their supply of finance choked by the banks.

Those developments represent significant potential for getting the construction industry moving again and providing much-needed housing in many areas. I ask the Finance Minister and his colleagues in the Executive to look at that matter to identify the necessary steps to get those stalled schemes moving again.

There will be an issue in relation to the extent of Northern Ireland's exposure to events

in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in relation to the future activities of the national Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the restructuring of the Republic's banking sector. I know that the Minister will have been in regular contact with his counterparts in the Republic, including the late Minister Lenihan. Can the Finance Minister advise the House what reassurances he has received about safeguarding Northern Ireland's interests in those matters?

No doubt, many Members will be aware of the shrinkage in visitor numbers and spend in Northern Ireland's tourism industry in the past 12 months. It is substantially down year on year and is well short of Programme for Government targets. Tourism is a key industry, particularly for the capital city of Belfast. It employs 10,000 people full time, and those who visit the city spend somewhere in the region of £455 million, which is crucial to the city's economy. It is clear that 2012 and 2013 will play a critical role in getting tourism back on track, particularly with the Titanic centenary next year and Londonderry's year as City of Culture in 2013.

In that context, it is critical that we persuade the Government at Westminster to address the current regime in respect of air passenger duty, which is substantially increasing the cost of air travel to and from here. With regard to transatlantic tourism, the current high levels make life particularly difficult for Northern Ireland given the sharp contrast with the Republic of Ireland's equivalent tax, which is substantially lower. Tourism professionals now express real concern about the future of Northern Ireland's only direct US flight to Newark, New Jersey. Can the Minister update the House on the current status of the Executive's efforts in that regard?

Finally, the Minister will be aware of the March Budget and the Chancellor's announcement of the creation of 21 new enterprise zones in England that will benefit from substantial business rate discounts; mechanisms to provide for investment in revenues; simplified planning regimes; and super-fast broadband infrastructure. There would be significant merit in a scheme of that nature to assist particular areas in Northern Ireland to attract investment, particularly where such areas have the opportunity to address long-term unemployment and reduce poverty at the same time.

Obviously, there are pitfalls with such a scheme. Indeed, critics have pointed out the mixed results of similar enterprise in England in the 1980s. There can be no doubt, however, that it would be beneficial to explore the potential in Northern Ireland for a focused variant that could be adapted to suit particular circumstances here. It is unlikely that schemes here would be on the same scale as those that have already been announced in England. Nevertheless, such a development would be positive in that it would stimulate the local economy.

The Minister will also be aware of the north foreshore, which is in my constituency of North Belfast. It is a 300-acre development site that could benefit substantially from a new regime to stimulate investment. Can the Minister advise the Assembly of his discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury on enterprise zones? I ask him to bear in mind the north foreshore in any future discussions on the development scheme that he may have with the national Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Brenda Hale, I remind the House that it is convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mrs Hale: I am honoured to rise as a Member for the constituency of Lagan Valley. I welcome the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I rise to support the Bill of my friend and colleague Sammy Wilson MP, the Finance Minister. He has no easy task in presiding over the Budget at a time of limited resources. His and our task is to maximise the use of those scarce resources and to ensure the most equitable distribution on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. That is not just his responsibility but that of each and every Member of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, before I return to the Budget, I would be grateful if you would allow me to make some comments about my constituency and my journey to this House. First, I want to thank the people of Lagan Valley for returning me as one of four DUP Members for the constituency of Lagan Valley. I am honoured and privileged to take on the responsibility that they have bestowed on me. It is a task that I do not take lightly.

I would like to thank my family, especially our daughters, Victoria and Alexandra, for their patience, love and understanding throughout the campaign, and my husband, Mark, for his

continued inspiration. I would also like to thank all of my party colleagues in Lagan Valley, especially Mr Jeffrey Donaldson MP for his guidance, wisdom and support.

Many Members may already know my background. I am extremely proud to have been the wife of a soldier who served his country in a place where democracy must prevail. He made the ultimate sacrifice while trying to save the lives of his soldiers. He is much loved and always missed. Many politicians attended my husband's funeral. However, only one called round a few weeks later to see how things were. That was Jeffrey Donaldson. Things were terrible.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is sadly lacking when it comes to looking after injured soldiers and bereaved families. It really should look to the many regiments to see how they support individual cases. I firmly believe that our soldiers and their families deserve the opportunity to discuss ignored issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. I look forward to working with my colleague the Health Minister to discuss how that can be resourced within the available budget.

Mr Donaldson facilitated a meeting with the then Secretary of Defence Bob Ainsworth to raise that and many other issues. The matter is very much ongoing. I thank the right honourable MP for Lagan Valley for his unstinting support. The DUP was there for my girls and me after the press had gone. That is politics working on the ground and is an example to us all.

4.15 pm

The parliamentary constituency of Lagan Valley was established as a result of the 1983 boundary changes. In the constituency, you will find the city of Lisburn, home to Thiepval barracks, headquarters of the Army in Northern Ireland. Lisburn has a proud and rich history. It is the birthplace of the linen industry and home to some 71,000 people. In the south west of the constituency, you will find the County Down market town of Dromore, where my constituency office is based. Dromore is home to some 5,000 people.

I am proud to serve the people of Lagan Valley. In this mandate, those people can be assured that I will be their voice here at Stormont. Being passionate about education, the military and our children, I would like to say something about the children of our serving personnel, not

only in Lagan Valley but throughout Northern Ireland. Schools in our garrison towns deal with a transient community of pupils who arrive with a variety of needs. Those needs may be highlighted when the regiment is actively deployed. The stress placed on service families while daddy is away affects not only the child but the whole classroom. Teachers have to accommodate those emotional needs as they may have a direct effect on learning.

When the door is knocked and the very worst news is delivered, the whole classroom and school have to come to terms with major issues. Sensitivity is required. All of a sudden, you need to be mindful of things that previously might not have caused you a second thought, such as the making of a Father's Day card, celebrating Christmas or supporting your child on a sports day. Teachers and staff have to use all their skills to include the bereaved child, while ensuring that their classmates are not missing out on the social events that mark our calendar. At this point, I must say a heartfelt thank you to both my daughters' schools.

Given that we live in times of austerity and I am making my maiden speech on a budgetary issue, I want to highlight the concerns of the many parents, children and staff at Dromore High School and Dromore Central Primary School. Dromore has been waiting for new school buildings for as long as anyone can remember. The proposals came so close yet so far in the last mandate, when the previous Education Minister halted any progress on the applications. That was despite the fact that the land had been purchased and the diggers and builders were ready to commence.

I want to use my maiden speech to call on the Minister of Education to review the decision of his predecessor and ensure that justice is done, especially when priority has been given, and money allocated, to Irish language schools. It is appalling that the staff and children, many of whom whose parents were also pupils in those schools, have to work and study in the conditions that exist in the old buildings. I appeal to the Minister to be positively proactive and make real improvements for the schoolchildren in Dromore. Although I appreciate that money is tight, I believe that there is enough money in education to fund the proposals. Education is one of many issues that relates directly to the development and growth of a healthy and skilled workforce. It is an

issue that we cannot take lightly, especially in providing proper resources and buildings for our children and ensuring a centre of excellence on our front door.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your patience, and to all Members for allowing me to make my maiden speech. I am happy to support the Bill.

Mr McCarthy: I congratulate the Member for the very dignified manner in which she has just spoken. I offer her my support and wish her success in the years ahead.

As the Alliance Party's health spokesperson, I would like to say a few words on some of the health aspects of the Budget. The Committee Chairperson covered some of the things that I wanted to say, but I will add a few comments. I will not keep the Minister any longer than is necessary, because I am sure that he is anxious to respond before midnight. I offer congratulations to him on his reappointment and to his young assistant on his left, who comes from our Strangford constituency. Only the best come from Strangford, of course. Congratulations to you both. I hope that you have a successful few years.

Over the coming years of the Assembly I, like everyone, hope to see major reforms in the Health Service that result in a much better service for everyone. It is estimated that, if we continue to do the same things and provide the same services in the same buildings, there could be a £1 billion shortfall in the health budget by 2014-15. The Alliance Party has called for a cross-party working group to be formed to look into and seek agreement on any such potential reforms, so that we can have a better Health Service for all our people.

As things stand, health got a better deal in funding terms in the current Budget, with a lower level of cuts than other Departments. We simply must work and do our best with what we have and do it wisely and well. We must also plan for the future health needs of the population as a whole and shape resources around that. Money must be used wisely; for example, on preventative and early intervention measures that will save money in the long term. However, I must express some concern that a number of early intervention organisations such as Home-Start are threatened with closure. I have mentioned that organisation in the Chamber before. It does excellent work in helping young

families, and it is wise to invest in people at an early age.

Mr A Maginness: The Member has spoken about using funds wisely and the need to be prudent, etc. There does seem to be a growing consensus — I believe a dangerous consensus — that that will involve the axing of acute services in hospitals throughout the North. For example, in my constituency, the accident and emergency unit at the Mater Hospital is under threat. Indeed, I received a reply earlier from the Minister that was so non-committal it caused alarm bells to ring. I ask the Member, as the health spokesperson for the Alliance Party, to assure the House that the Alliance Party will not be part and parcel of a programme to close acute services in hospitals throughout the North, and that it will protect those services for vulnerable people in, for example, north Belfast.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. I hear what he is saying, and I think that all Members will have received correspondence from people who are very concerned. In an answer to one of his colleagues during Question Time earlier today, the Health Minister said that there was a “rumour” about a potential closure in the Mater Hospital. We can only take what the Minister said and look forward to his reforms. I would not like to see any of our acute hospitals closed to the detriment of any of our population. I hope that that answers the Member’s question.

Mr Wilson: I am interested to know whether the Member can marry together the two statements that he made. At the beginning of his speech, he said that if we continue to do what we presently do, in the same way and in the same buildings, we will have a huge deficit. However, he is now saying that he does not want to see any hospitals touched. How does that fit with his earlier statement? Surely the whole idea is that we cannot continue doing what we have been doing in the way that we have been doing it and that there must be some change. The Member seems to be ruling change out now.

Mr McCarthy: There is no doubt that things must be done differently and better for the whole population, and we will need to very closely examine what the review brings up. We all know that there are modern methods of doing things better and differently, and that is exactly what we want to see. However, at the end of the day, we want to see a service that

provides locally as far as is humanly possible, and I think that that is what the Member for North Belfast called for. I hope that I have answered the Minister reasonably satisfactorily.

Returning to my speech, I talked about Home-Start and the concerns about possible closures, which, if we are talking about the need for intervention and prevention, would be an absolute disgrace. Another case is the Life Education Centre. I do not know how long it has been in existence, but it has been on the go for ages. It has a travelling wagon that goes around schools primarily to educate young people on the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and so on. I understand that it is under threat owing to lack of funding. That is the sort of thing that can prevent people from falling into ill health. If we invest money now and urge people to look after their own health, we can avoid costly bills resulting from obesity, heart problems and the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

I noticed that the Health Minister congratulated the Health Promotion Agency, and I support 100% the work that that agency has done to encourage more people to get involved in sports activity — walking, swimming, and so on — to keep the population out of GPs’ surgeries and hospitals.

The public must play their part by ensuring that they access the Health Service at the correct level. An ailment that could be seen by a GP during office hours should not waste resources in an accident and emergency department or at an out-of-hours GP service. We must cut down on attacks on health providers, which cause untold damage, cost a lot of money and take up time at our accident and emergency units. We want to see a vast improvement from the public in reducing the incidence of broken appointments, which can cost thousands of pounds per annum.

I welcomed the new Health Minister’s first decision, which was to give the go-ahead for the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, particularly given the co-operation that was and is being received from the South of Ireland. I hope that the Minister will continue to look to see where money can be saved from sharing services on a North/South basis. He indicated his willingness to grasp all the opportunities and reiterated that today when answering questions.

I want to see increased funding for mental health provision, especially as we are still

underfunded compared with the rest of the UK. I am sure that all Members want to see the Bamford report delivered in full and as quickly as possible. We are expecting two separate Bills on mental health and mental capacity, but, by having a single Bill, we can have a more integrated system. Let us be a world leader in the field and save money by reducing the stigma and discrimination that is often associated with mental health.

At this juncture, I pay tribute to our scientists and universities for the research and development that they do. It is excellent work. I woke up this morning to hear great news on the radio that they had discovered a new cystic fibrosis drug. That is fantastic news for everyone in Northern Ireland, and certainly for all the sufferers of cystic fibrosis. Northern Ireland is a world leader in that sphere, so let us hope that that can continue.

The Finance Minister has stressed the importance of health alongside the economy. The Alliance Party will gladly support anything that he does to ensure that money is spent correctly on improving the public's health and the service that we receive when we require it.

Mr Swann: As a North Antrim MLA, I hope that you will extend me some latitude, Mr Deputy Speaker, in using notes in this place.

In my maiden speech, I referred to those who seem to know the price of everything but the value of nothing. I hope that today's debate will lead to the introduction of a system in which we value the services delivered. I will highlight a couple of issues today.

I am the Ulster Unionist Party's spokesman on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure operates 80% of its budget through arm's-length bodies. Taking into consideration the financial implications of introducing legislation, I ask the Finance Minister whether the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure should not consider carefully her intention to bring forward an Irish language Bill or strategy.

4.30 pm

We in the Ulster Unionist Party believe that a strategy for an indigenous or regional minority language should be presented to the Executive. The commitment in the St Andrews Agreement was not for a strategy or Act based solely on the

Irish language. An Irish language Act would be divisive, and the Minister has already admitted to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure that it would be very unlikely to gain support from all sides of the House. In today's economic climate, should we even be considering legislation, given its financial implications, that would not make it through the legislative process?

A Member who spoke earlier referred to the competitive nature that is needed in our film industry. One such success is that of Northern Ireland Screen. However, if we listen to its officials, the recent success of attracting the second series of HBO's 'Game of Thrones' to Northern Ireland was despite the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) input rather than enhanced by it. I welcome the filming of the second series in part of my constituency of North Antrim.

I am also concerned at the value placed on those 10 rural libraries that are under threat of closure by the board of Libraries NI. I hope that the proposed closure of those 10 libraries is based on its vision rather than purely on cost savings. The proposal comes despite its having been given an additional £4.5 million since the consultation began.

Another issue related to the DCAL budget is that of the special adviser to the Minister, whose position was included in the Main Estimates that were passed last week. The Ulster Unionist Party has made its feelings known about the insensitive appointment of Mary McArdle and will not accept Sinn Féin's attempts to justify the unjustifiable.

As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I would also like to highlight a number of situations in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), including the impact of the error that the Department made by inadvertently requesting insufficient cash from the Assembly to deliver the departmental budget as agreed by the Executive. One senior DARD official said:

"Fortunately, a process exists to remedy the situation."

Many a farmer out there would love to be able to make an error inadvertently and then, fortunately, to claim it back.

The Finance Minister rather light-heartedly referred to the incident by saying that the Department put a plus sign instead of a minus

sign in front of a figure of £45 million, causing a mismatch of £90 million. Will the Minister give the House and the wider agricultural and rural community an undertaking that DARD's minus signs and plus signs are in order this time and that he will take steps to address that kind of financial mismanagement in the future?

The Department told the Committee that it had fixed the problem by putting in place a better process through which it monitors not only the expenditure of cash but the cash in hand that is under its authority. The Department said that it was now helped by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), but what was the Department doing before DFP stepped in?

Ms Ritchie: It is timely to have this debate at the outset of this four-year, or possibly five-year, Assembly mandate to remind ourselves that, although the Executive's Budget is largely determined for the current year, it is not set in stone for the next four years. The Budget is predicated on a wide range of assumptions about the future which may or may not prove to be accurate. We also have every opportunity to make things better, particularly the Budget.

A further shaping of the Budget is vital because public expenditure is our principal economic lever and driver. Right now, we do not really have any other levers. If we are serious about growing and rebalancing the economy, we have to use public expenditure and our Budget strategy to support that objective. Our firm contention is that the Budget must do more for economic rebalancing and job creation. It has to be about more than administering the block grant and allocating £4 billion of cuts. It has to drive the economy forward and rebalance the state and the wealth-creating sector.

The first thing that we need to do is to get serious about mitigating the cuts by raising new revenue streams and surpassing our targets for capital receipts. Remember that we failed dismally, all of us, to achieve the level of capital receipts targeted in the previous mandate. Although the economic downturn was one reason for that failure, it was not the only one. A lot of it was due to lack of will. Therefore, we need to be more determined about the future.

The Executive's Budget seeks to mitigate the £4 billion of cuts with some £800 million in receipts over the next four years. Although there were claims by the Minister that that was a prudent and conservative estimate, there are

already signs of slippage. Instead of exceeding that target, we are already falling behind it.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ritchie: I will give way in a few minutes.

We can do much better. If we really applied ourselves to the task, we could mitigate most, if not all, of the £4 billion of cuts.

Members will recall the detailed proposals prepared by my party, which identified a wide range of options open to the Executive to use the Budget to drive the economy forward. Those proposals, which are set out in 'Partnership and Economic Recovery' — I note that the Minister indicated that he had knowledge of them — still stand, and merit further consideration.

The second area requiring action is public sector reform. We need to "right-size" the public sector and drive through the necessary efficiencies. If we do that right, we will not only release significant resources for reallocation to other priorities but improve the quality of public services.

Mr Wilson: The Member continued where she left off in the previous mandate by making wide and sweeping statements about disaster, economic catastrophe, etc. She states that there are "already signs of slippage" in the programme to raise money. What are the signs? What sales due to occur this year will not occur? Two months into the new Budget period, is it realistic for her to say that there are signs of slippage?

If she can point out to me where those signs of slippage are and where the money that we should have had by this stage has not been realised, I will be happy to concede to her statement. Otherwise, I hope that she will withdraw it as another one of the wild statements to which we have become used.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for his intervention. He will not be surprised to hear that I will not resile from the observations that I have just made. He should cast his mind back to the Crossnacreevy case and all the wild suggestions made in the first few months of the first mandate about the realisation of receipts which never happened. We have plenty of evidence to show that what was suggested has not materialised.

We all need to drop some of our ideological baggage, because the one thing that the public charges us to do is to find solutions to

problems, and we have to find solutions that will bring forward economic recovery. In the previous mandate, we all failed to do that. Just look at the review of public administration. We should have done better and been able to implement the proposals. Hopefully, when my colleague the new Environment Minister produces proposals on RPA, people will focus on the overall prize.

Then there was the Executive's mismanagement of Northern Ireland Water. The most recent proposal to reintegrate that organisation into DRD is deeply flawed. We need to look at something like mutualisation.

I am not trying to allocate blame. There has been collective failure in some areas, which we must stop repeating. I hope that the Minister can apply not only his knowledge but his expertise to aspects of the economy related to the construction industry and to other Departments. We all have examples of that.

For example, in private residential housing estates where developers have lodged bonds with Roads Service, the banks' inability to provide those developers with credit has meant that they have been unable to complete the roads infrastructure and all the attendant matters in the estates. Residents in those estates have found themselves in the position where the roads, street lighting and other aspects of the infrastructure have not been brought up to the standard that Roads Service requires for adoption. As a result, as they see it, those developers face depreciation in the value of their properties.

In dealing with this particular financial matter, which involves bonds and Roads Service, I think that the Finance Minister should have immediate discussions with the Minister for Regional Development. I have tabled questions to the Minister for Regional Development about this matter, and I know that he and his Assembly Private Secretary (APS) are looking at it. I think that it would be particularly beneficial if you, Minister, could assist them so that we can all obtain a resolution on behalf of our constituents throughout the North of Ireland.

I will also mention our budgetary and financial processes, which do us few favours. I know that the Minister himself is critical of aspects of our financial system, and, although he has my support in negotiating greater flexibility with the Treasury, he could take steps to introduce greater flexibility and incentivisation.

Specifically, I believe that DFP should incentivise Departments to achieve greater efficiencies. At present, if Departments make savings in one area, they have to surrender to DFP the money that is released. So, there is little incentive for Ministers to really chase savings.

As I understand, a little example of that happened last week. The Minister of the Environment removed a vacant grade 3 post from his departmental structure. That simple step will save DOE around £0.5 million over the Budget period. However, the Department will not be able to divert that resource to another programme. Most Ministers in such circumstances would probably not have done what Minister Attwood did, but they might have had they been allowed to keep at least some of the money and invest it in some other ways in their Department, thereby allowing better management and better delivery on the ground. I invite the Minister to look at how other Ministers can be better incentivised to run a really tight ship.

When we talk about the Budget, the Budget (No. 2) Bill and the economy, another area to consider is the Programme for Government. From my understanding, we so far still do not have a Programme for Government. I would always have thought that the ability to align policy, programmes and projects to budgets would create a better Budget. However, if we do not have a Programme for Government, we should ask what we are basing this Budget on. What policy and economic delivery mechanisms are we basing this Budget on? I am asking that question, and I tabled questions on the matter in the previous mandate. More recently, I tabled questions on the issue to the Finance Minister and to the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I am looking for substantive answers. We are looking for delivery on that, and I think that all Members are doing so.

In summary, I am convinced that we can do more to help ourselves than we have done in the past. The Budget presents this unique opportunity to focus resources more into those areas that will boost economic development and job recovery. Only last week we had an opportunity to talk to the Chancellor about those issues that not only impact our local economy but can act as drivers in that economy. Those issues can include tax-varying powers, the need to reduce air passenger duty and the probable need to lower the level of corporation

tax, which is a measure that we support. Those measures need to be looked at along with the re-introduction of the credit scheme for those involved in the quarry industry. Without that scheme, those in the construction industry are feeling severe impacts.

All these are major drivers in our economy and need to be examined. I know that the Minister of Finance is looking with his ministerial counterparts in London at corporation tax and the credit scheme for aggregates. I look forward to an update report on those.

4.45 pm

I hope that all of us in the Chamber, and all Members of the Assembly, can take the opportunity in the period ahead to look at the implications of this Budget to see how we can improve it and better deliver for the people that we represent so that there can be better economic outcomes, better opportunities for new job creation, and the sustaining of existing jobs.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. Dealing with the Budget is, of course, one of our main tasks in ensuring that we protect front line services and their delivery. I am sure that many people are looking at what is happening, for example, with regard to Southern Cross, community care and the whole debate around ageing and demographics.

I am not sure when the census will be finalised and ready for publication, but will the Minister be reviewing any of the Budget and Programme for Government with regard to the change of demographics and meeting the needs of an ageing population? We do not only have to plan for this four-year period; the strategy will have to be around a much longer-term scenario with regard to care of older people.

The Minister may also be minded to give us some insight into his thoughts on the rate of inflation and rising energy costs, the medium- to long-term impact those will have and the implications for his Budget across Departments. I met one agrifood producer last week whose energy costs have risen by 144% in the past few months. Tackling the cost of energy is critical not just to industry but to many households that are suffering from fuel poverty. A major employer in my constituency, Almac, faces competition from the United States in energy costs incurred here in the North compared with that of its Philadelphia plant. So, Minister, I would be

interested to hear your predictions about that, and what consideration you have given in your Budget to those two elements.

If I may, I will read the Ulster Farmers' Union's (UFU) comments about the Agriculture Department's budget. The reason I want to do that is to explore the "what if" scenarios with regard to the Minister's oversight across all Departments. The Ulster Farmers' Union has criticised DARD's budget in that it is proposing to make savings of £43 million. The UFU states that the proposals:

"are not...strategic but rather are piecemeal in approach with a focus on cutting expenditure on soft targets while avoiding any tough decisions on targeting efficiencies within the Department. As evidence the Department proposals suggest spending cuts of...4.75% of the overall budget, while also anticipating...reductions of...2.8% of current staff levels... it would be reasonable to anticipate a pro rata reduction in staffing...would suggest a further reduction of 55 jobs or savings of approximately £11m over the budget period."

Minister, I just wonder in relation to the function of PEDU and any energy efficiency savings advice that can be given to each of the Departments, whether that advice is being taken up by each Department. I wonder whether the terms of reference for that body are sufficient to allow it to make some very critical analysis and far-reaching recommendations in relation to its findings, and how any particular Minister may then be able to heed or ignore the advice given. What is your view on that, Minister, and how do you propose to deal with those situations?

Minister, I serve on both the Agriculture Committee and the Regional Development Committee, and a recurring theme of respondents in relation to the budgets of both those Departments is around health and safety. Many stakeholders are concerned about the provision of plant, the replacement of machinery or, indeed, the resurfacing of roads, which is predicted to fall behind by a sum total of £875 million by the end of this financial year alone. What advice are you giving to Ministers in relation to the function of health and safety and how critical that is as a key criterion for the selection of projects to be funded?

Minister, you will also be aware of your own party's commitment to not increase tuition fees beyond the cost of inflation. I believe that your party, along with others, believes that the £40

million shortfall in higher education could be met from the Executive Budget and not fall to DEL or the universities to find. Can you give us an update on the thinking there? It is vital that the universities, students and their families know where they are going to be in the next few weeks in respect of applications for places at university and what funds people will need to put in place to pay for their children to attend university.

I share my party colleague Margaret Ritchie's concerns about the fact that there is still no Programme for Government. I also share the concern of many stakeholders that many Departments did not conduct an equality impact assessment in relation to their budgets. That is a criticism of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's budget in particular, whether or not there is still time to complete such an assessment.

There is also the issue of prison reform and how speedily, or not, the Justice Minister decides to tackle the costs of retaining a prisoner in our jails as compared to England, Scotland or Wales, or, indeed, the South of Ireland. There are significant savings that could be made should people grasp that nettle.

Also, Minister, it would be interesting to hear your views on the decision by the Agriculture Minister in relation to the decentralisation of the HQ. Although my party supports decentralisation per se, I think that the stakeholders have valid comments to make about the timing of setting aside that money for such decentralisation in the absence of any information on the impact of efficiency savings on both jobs and new technology, what the needs are and whether that should go ahead.

As regards the impact of welfare reform, we are going to see many more of our people fall well below the poverty line as the Tory/Lib Dem Government hit welfare benefits. That will have an impact not only on the individuals and families immediately affected but on the wider service and on income into Northern Ireland's economy. I know about the social protection fund, but I do not believe that is going to go well enough if the amounts of money currently being talked about in relation to reductions come into play over the next four years.

Minister, what are your plans for dealing with the cost of sickness and absenteeism, particularly

within the area of the Civil Service for which you have direct responsibility?

It is a huge job of work, Minister. I do not think that anyone envies your task, or that of other Ministers, in looking at this difficult financial climate. I note that the construction sector has already suffered the loss of some 22,000 jobs over the last couple of years, but I am sure you will agree with me that that does not take into account the service sector, whether it is the carpet fitters or suppliers of furniture for all those new homes, that works alongside it.

Given the capital cuts in the Budget, I wonder whether the Minister has any plans for how other moneys can be raised to assist the construction sector, either through building new schools, maintaining schools or building social housing.

There is a huge job of work to be done, and the Executive, and the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in particular, have to address as a matter of urgency the issue of sectarianism in a divided society. Unfortunately, in the previous mandate, Sinn Féin representatives in particular voted against publishing the cost of division report, which alleged that over £1 billion a year was being added to our costs because of sectarianism. It would have been interesting to see how those conclusions were drawn. It could show us a way forward in ensuring that some reforms and savings can be made to meet everyone's needs.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister. It will come as no surprise to Members that I will be singing from the same hymn sheet as the two previous Members — my party colleague and my party leader.

As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I will focus my comments on that area. When she spoke earlier, the Chairperson of the Health Committee referred to this year's projected shortfall of £177 million. I have looked at the projected figures for the next four years, and to describe the outlook as bleak would require the wearing of rose-tinted glasses. The figures really do not make for good reading at all. However, it is vital that we in this House be committed to working together to explore every avenue that is available to us to achieve efficiencies without adversely affecting services, particularly for vulnerable people, who are, by definition, those most dependent on the services provided in the sector.

Earlier contributors to the debate, including the Chairperson of the Health Committee and Kieran McCarthy, a member of the Committee, have, in Committee, speculated or commented on potential ways of saving money. They both touched on generic prescribing. As a former member of the Western Trust's local commissioning group (LCG), which ran a pilot prescribing programme, I have first-hand experience of how savings can be quickly and effectively realised. A directive has to come from on high that prescribing generic drugs be made compulsory rather than voluntary.

Although savings are there to be made by opting for generic drugs rather than patented medicines, there are other areas in which money can be saved. We need to look at what is available on prescription. So many over-the-counter products are now available on prescription that it defies belief. Without attacking anyone with a particular condition, I must say that it boggles the mind that a coeliac patient can, for instance, get gluten-free Black Forest gateaux on prescription. We really need to examine that, and savings can and should be made there.

The Health Department must look at how services are delivered and, in many cases, who delivers them. Many services could be delivered by people who are better placed, such as those in the community and voluntary sector. This afternoon at Question Time, I was glad to hear the Minister give his commitment to remaining open-minded on that issue. Cross-departmental collaboration can realise savings. Pretty often, the Health Department is left to carry the can for sectors for which it should not be the sole responsible Department. I think of adults with special needs, of whom the Department of Education washes its hands once those individuals reach the age of 18 or 19. They become the responsibility of the Health Department, when so many other Departments, such as DEL, DETI and, in some cases, the Department of Justice have a role to play.

5.00 pm

Although cross-departmental collaboration can undoubtedly achieve savings, cross-border collaboration certainly can. I take this opportunity to again congratulate the Health Minister on his announcement regarding the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, which was symbolic in setting a precedent on how the

Governments on either side of the border can work together to deliver services for the people of this island in a cost-effective manner. Some bodies that focus on cross-border collaboration in health delivery exist already, such as Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT), which, although funded from Europe, has shown that savings can be realised and services can be delivered through co-operation.

It should not be beyond our capability or imagination to have a specialist unit — specifically, a team — on this island to deal with rare disorders. In this day and age, it is shocking that we have to send so many young people with rare illnesses across the water to receive treatment, which is most distressing for them and unsettling for their families, as well as being extremely expensive for the Government here.

The Minister reiterated his commitment to the Public Health Agency and the need to give it more funding. That is, indeed, very important. To see real savings in the future, we have to invest in preventative healthcare; prevention is better than cure. I think that it was Dolores Kelly who referred to demographic change and the fact that we have an ageing population. The demand for care, be it residential or domiciliary, will increase hugely. The recent crisis — it cannot be described as anything other than that — with Southern Cross set alarm bells ringing with me. Where is the contingency budget within the health budget? If the rug is pulled from under all those residents of Southern Cross care homes — rather than hair combs — in September, who will pick up the pieces? We will be expected to, but where will the money come from to do so?

I spoke about Departments and Governments working together, but it is vital that we in the Chamber also work together. We have to get away from the culture of Minister-bashing and do our best to get a positive message out to the public. However, although the message has to be positive, it must also be real. We cannot carry on with the smoke and mirrors. Good and honest communication is the key to our getting through this.

Mr Wilson: I am very sympathetic with the Member's view on stopping Minister-bashing. Indeed, I would give great support to it. However, I hope that he would not go as far as saying that Ministers should not be allowed to bash Members, would he?

Mr Durkan: It is just verbal Minister-bashing that I advocate stopping.

We need to work on communication, which is vital, and it will become even more so as the Department communicates more with staff, patients, the wider public and the media. The media love nothing more than Minister-bashing. The only thing that they might love more than Minister-bashing is manager-bashing. It is vital that we work collectively to tackle those gargantuan tasks that face the Health Department and the Government as a whole.

Mr Allister: There has to be something strikingly odd about debating a Budget Bill without knowing where it fits in the matrix that makes up the entirety of the financial direction. In the arrangements that prevail in the House, the financial direction is surely informed not just by the Budget, which is perhaps a vehicle, but more particularly by the Programme for Government and the strategic investment targets. We know nothing about either of the latter, but we are expected to set, and get it right in setting, a Budget. That seems to speak directly to the dysfunctionality of the arrangements in the House.

When that matter was raised last week, the Minister's response was, in essence, to shrug his shoulders. Maybe that is because the Minister knows that when, or if, the Programme for Government comes, it will be utterly vacuous, which is pretty much like the last one. Maybe the strategic investment priorities will be of a similar ilk. Maybe that is why the Minister is so laid-back while promoting a Budget that is outside the confines and context of the triangular arrangement that should exist to give it real impact and drive. It points to a systemic failure in regard to the governmental arrangements in Northern Ireland that we have that conundrum. You are promised, but you do not see and do not know when you will see, a Programme for Government. You have a Budget, which is supposed to be there to give financial feet to that programme, and which is drawn up without cognisance of a Programme for Government, because it does not exist, and without adherence to what its objectives are, because they have not been articulated. It would be pretty much like a family saying that their programme for the year is to have a foreign holiday, build a conservatory and buy a new car and then deciding their budget and how to direct it towards their priorities. However, when it

comes to the running of Northern Ireland, we do not even address those basic fundamentals.

The Minister, in an effort to deflect, with the assistance of the ever clever Mr Hamilton, may come up with some riposte about the setting of budgets. However, it still does not distract from the fact that we have a supposedly triangular arrangement in regard to financial planning in Northern Ireland, two aspects of which the House, to this point, has been kept totally in the dark about. I know the Minister will not want to address that. When he is cornered on something, he always simply reverts to form: you get sound and fury, but it always signifies nothing. No doubt that is what we will get again on that fundamental systemic point about where we are with budgetary planning in Northern Ireland.

We all know that the 2011-12 Budget is part of a four-year budgetary plan. We also know, because we have been told it often enough, that things will get tougher, particularly in years 2, 3 and 4. It is bad enough that we do not know where we are going with policy and strategy, but, in the Budget, there is no attempt whatsoever to prepare for the tougher times that are coming in years 2, 3 and 4, when the cuts will inevitably begin to really bite.

Some people talk about elephants in the room, but in this room, rather than elephants, we have sacred cows. In the governmental arrangements that presently pertain in Northern Ireland, it does not matter how wasteful, useless, unnecessary and pointless those sacred cows are; you spend the money on them because they are part of the architecture that keeps this place together. The Minister knows in his heart that, in the circumstances in which he has been constrained to operate, it is absolute folly to pour £400 million into, for example, the multiple, useless North/South bodies when we are looking for money to deal with tuition fees, to keep hospitals going and to employ new teachers. Yet, because they are the sacred cows of this political dispensation, they are beyond the reach of being culled and beyond the reach of the waste that is endemic in their being dealt with.

Indeed, the Budget contains proposals that are far from cutting. It contains proposals that more should be spent on, for example, the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). The out-turn figure in 2009-2010 was £712 million. The resource figure that is now proposed in 2011-12 is an increase of almost 50%. When

we are cutting back on schools, hospitals, road maintenance and road gritting, we will find extra money for that body. Why is that? It is because it is one of the sacred cows of these establishments.

Indeed, you are not even allowed to know the community background of those who work in that sacred cow. This week, I received an answer to my question on what the community background is of the Northern Ireland civil servants who work in the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). The answer is that I am not entitled to know. We needlessly and pointlessly pour hundreds of thousands, nay millions, of pounds into such groups and bodies, not to mention the ones that people can hardly remember the name of, such as the Food Safety whatever in Cork, which employs no one in Northern Ireland. Not only that but you cannot even question the funding of them, and, more than that, you cannot even ask what the community background is of those who work there. Whatever one's politics, that is wrong, and we should not be engaging in that in the funding of establishments in this country.

So, not only do you have secrecy there, but, as I said last week, this Budget also has the money to pay special advisers, and, my oh my, what a cloister of secrecy prevails there. We are not allowed to know how much public money in this Budget Bill goes to any individual special adviser, someone with access to the upper echelons and confidence of government.

5.15 pm

We are not allowed to know how much is poured into a pension fund for them. We are not allowed to know how much they draw down in expenses. We are not allowed to know if any of them even get bonuses. We are dealing with public money, and doing so should bring with it a responsibility for transparency. It is bad enough that someone who is a convicted murderer can be appointed as a special adviser, but it is compounded by the fact that you are not even allowed to know how much public money we will pay to that person.

What a trail of obfuscation there has been. Right back from 2007, special advisers with family connections were appointed, but you cannot be told how much public money they get. In the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we have a special adviser who is the husband of a Minister in that office. You

cannot even ask how much that spouse of a Minister is paid. For a year, a relative of the first First Minister in this Province was appointed and paid a sum believed to be well in excess of what other special advisers were paid. However, it was never disclosed.

The same individual now benefits in spite of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, who turned down the requested pay increase for him, meaning that he now has to benefit from a bonus of £36,000 in his present job of chief executive of Invest NI. The Minister of Finance and Personnel was never even asked because, supposedly, there is a contractual term. However, when you query where that contractual term is, you discover that it is not in his contract. Even someone who knows nothing about law might think that a contractual term would be in a contract. However, the contractual term relied on in this case is something that was contained in the information for applicants but was never translated into the contract. Therefore, it is not a contractual term at all, yet it has been treated as if it was so that that chief executive can be paid an additional bonus, not on top of some meagre salary, but on top of £160,000 per annum. If this House has any regard for transparency and the proper spending of public money then, instead of those issues being swept under the carpet and instead of refusal to answer and to tell us what special advisers and others are paid, information should be published so that the public who pay might read it.

The Budget contains money for consultants. The amount of money devoted to consultants was unbelievable during the last Assembly. Why do we employ senior civil servants on generous salaries who are experts in many of their fields if every time we ask them a hard question, they say, "Let's bring in a consultant"?

We cannot go on like that. If we are paying people grade-3 salaries and better, we expect top-grade service. It is not sufficient simply to call in the consultants so that a senior civil servant does not have to be accountable for any decision; so that he can say, "That was taken on advice". That culture, which imbues the entire Civil Service, costs this country far more than we can afford.

Some Departments recently reduced the amount paid to consultants. May I ask the Minister: has there been a corresponding increase in the

number of people given temporary contracts in some Departments? Are we seeing consultants by another name to massage downwards the figure paid out on consultancy fees? Is that one of the moves going on in some Departments?

We talked in Question Time about agriculture. We talked about the state on the front line of agriculture; of the needs in agriculture; of the waste in bureaucracy; of the farmers who are struggling with ever rising feedstuff prices and everything else. Yet the Department's primary interest and priority seems to be to create for itself a new headquarters: let us pour £26 million into new offices for the Minister and her staff. I say to the House: that is not what we should be doing in these stringent, difficult times when farmers are struggling beyond description to make ends meet. It is a sad but informative commentary on that Department that that is its top priority.

One could pick almost any Department and examine its expenditure under this Budget. Let me pick an item in the capital spend of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: the anticipated spend for the Maze. When I read the budgets that came out in the spring, I was struck by the fact that DETI — our job-creating Department — which is charged with laying the groundwork for attracting as much foreign investment as possible, faces a 64% cut in its capital budget. So much so, that the Minister had to say that there will be no new money, after that which is in the pipeline, for what we used to call advance factories, the purchase of sites or anything of that nature. There just is not the money.

The Programme for Government told us that job creation and building the economy were the irremovable top priority, yet we come to a DETI budget that, when it comes to laying the groundwork for an rolling programme of attracting foreign investment, has its budget slashed by 64%. However, when I look at the capital budget of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I find that budget to be, in effect, ring-fenced and that £20 million-plus is ring-fenced for the Maze project. Why? We come back to the sacred cows, Mr Deputy Speaker. Another sacred cow.

We are told that we need a conflict transformation centre. It has had so many names, but that has been one of the names given to it. Perhaps we do, but why do we

need it at the Maze? If we need a conflict transformation centre, why do we have to blight it with all the baggage of the Maze? Sadly, the answer is that those who are peddling it are interested in it only if it provides the facility for the shrine at the Maze. That is why it is suggested that it must be there. The buildings must be retained; they must be an integral part of it. It is not because we need a generic conflict transformation centre that could be on any greenfield site free of baggage, but because we need one that will be an aid to the rewriting of history. That is why ex-prisoners will sit on the board, and why it can and will be built there and only there. That is why, although we do not have money for new factories, we do have money for the Maze project. It is that sort of misdirection of priorities that brings discredit to the Government. They tell their people that these are tough times and that they have to cut their cloth accordingly. However, do not ask them to cut their cloth for their pet sacred-cow projects. No, they will cut your cloth. They will cut your schools and your hospitals — the things that matter to you.

As for the bloated presentation of the structures of government, oh yes, they promise that they have an aspiration to have fewer Assembly Members, fewer Departments, fewer special advisers and fewer quangos one day, but do not ask them to do anything about it. That is the harsh reality. People in the Chamber have talked for four years and more about reducing the bureaucracy of this place, and they will talk for the next four years and more and still not reduce it, because the political reality is that a veto is exercisable on that by those who favour the status quo. Those who favour the status quo, be it the retention of all the Departments, the iniquity of mandatory coalition or the denial of an opposition, are teeing themselves up to exercise that veto, and exercise it they will. Those who sit on my left in the House and who tell us so often and so frequently that they are against all those things will go on wearing it because it is the price of power. A great con will again be performed on the electorate in all those regards.

I speak of waste. I look back to the expenditure that is flowing through here on sports: GAA, soccer and rugby. There is nothing wrong with spending money on improving sports facilities when there is the money to spend. However, when we are faced with hospital and school closures, one does have to ask whether it is

right to prioritise and say that the GAA should get £61 million, and because it should get £61 million, football should get £61 million, although not in the four-year term — some of it on the never-never — even though it did not really ask for that much.

What is it that drives the economic financial priorities of the Executive that they think that that is the correct adjustment of the spending priorities? Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last time, it is clear that the essential driver is politics and not probity in finance. It goes on in that vein.

5.30 pm

We went through the budgetary documents; we relate some of it to some of the things that have been going on. We see in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development the habit of requiring Excess Votes, because it does not know when a minus should be a plus and when a plus should be a minus, and it got into deep trouble with Brussels over infraction fines. However, DARD has form. It has the form of Crossnacreevy, about which, last Thursday night, we had the remarkable spectacle of the First Minister, rather discomfited, but nonetheless trying to explain why land that never was development land and which was known to be green belt land was magically given a valuation of top-drawer development land. It was given the value of £200 million, when it maybe had a value of only £2 million, £3 million, £4 million or £5 million. It was given that value without a site-specific valuation. I appreciate that it was the current Finance Minister's predecessor, Mr Robinson, and not himself, who was Finance Minister at the time, but what sort of Finance Department is it that rubber-stamps a financial arrangement on a plot of land without a site-specific valuation?

That Minister, above all Ministers, knew that the Crossnacreevy land was not development land. It was a Minister who maybe knows a lot about the value of land in Castlereagh. It is strange how at one end it can be worth £5 and at the other end worth £200 million. However, there it is.

That illustrates a lack of financial probity in the conduct of affairs within DARD and the Department of Finance and Personnel, where a fiction can be created. That is what it was. It was a fiction that land of a few million would be written up as land of £200 million. Some sleight of hand in the books would be perfected to give

it that value. Again, that is the sort of budgetary handling that brings discredit to the House.

I see in the Budget that we are to have extra money for the Attorney General. The Attorney General is someone who plays an important role, but, largely, beyond the reach and control of the House. In the past few months, the Attorney General, needlessly and foolishly, cost the public purse something in excess of £40,000 through an ill-conceived threat and challenge to the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, only to withdraw the objection after tens of thousands had been wasted on legal fees. Yet, in this Budget, we are to hand the Attorney General, whom we cannot control in the House, a resources increase of something approaching 50%.

Why? Has the Minister questioned, challenged, sifted or enquired after why that increase is necessary?

I come now to another matter. Under this Government, we will now hand money to Departments for ministerial drivers. Members will be aware that, in the first four years of the Assembly, Sinn Féin refused to take the ministerial drivers on offer and insisted on appointing its own. However, Sinn Féin long campaigned that it should have public money for that purpose. I have been seeking to explore that with the Minister and have in my hand an answer. Maybe it is my intellectual deficiency that causes me to be unable to understand fully what is being said, but it seems to be an exercise in obfuscation. It now seems that a sum is to be given to each Department, within the Budget for 2011, out of which each Department, at its own discretion, can recruit drivers. Whether those new drivers will have Civil Service status is, according to this answer, a matter for individual Departments. Are we arriving at a situation in which Sinn Féin Ministers will be able to employ, out of the public purse, drivers of their choice and decide whether or not to give them Civil Service status? That seems to be the import of what is being suggested.

Why is that change being made? Why is it necessary within this Budget arrangement to make that change? Is the motivation financial or political? Is it a desire to settle a running sore politically or a desire to reach better financial arrangements of more probity? One thing seems to be clear: it is a surrender by the Department of Finance and Personnel of control of the appointment of Ministers' drivers

and the bequeathing of the power to the various Departments. You give them the money and tell them to get on with it. By and large, that seems to be the import. My question is why?

Last week, I asked about the £800 million promised on the transfer of policing and justice, but I did not get an answer. Where in the 2011-12 Budget can we trace that £800 million, and how much of it can we trace? Where in the Budget can we trace the sales of the four bequeathed bases? Are they within the Budget? Where within it do we find the resource costs to maintain those bases? Again, those are questions that were asked last week but went unanswered.

I trust that we will not have a repetition of the bluster, but that we will have answers as to the whereabouts of the £800 million in the Budget and the portion of it that should come down in 2011-12. I trust that we will get clear, transparent, black-and-white answers on an issue that was spun so unbelievably some time ago. Let us call in those figures, let us see where they are, and let us trust that they were not a fiction of spin and salesmanship.

There is much in this Budget to raise concerns, but I return to the point that I started with. If we are serious about saying to the greater public, “You must tighten your belt, and you must ready yourself for harder times”, this House needs to lead by example in its structures, in its architecture and in how it addresses waste. If we need to save hundreds of millions of pounds and more, why are we wasting hundreds of millions of pounds on matters such as the useless North/South bodies and the Maze project when we cannot find money for new factories?

Mr Lyttle: I will take a brief moment to make a contribution on the type of budgetary reforms that I hope the Finance Minister will support and that will improve the spending in this plan. If changes are made to how our public services are delivered, they will have the potential to cut waste and ensure that public money is spent more wisely. It is my belief that we need to further open up public services to benchmarking and market-testing procedures. We need our Ministers to examine the level of funding allocated in neighbouring regions on certain policy issues in order to help us, in some cases, to assess how much we should spend in Northern Ireland. The Minister of Justice, David

Ford, MLA, has already begun to employ that procedure with regard to legal aid in order to bring departmental spending on that policy area within budgetary control.

Benchmarking can also help us to see where inefficiencies exist and where we need to improve costs. If we do not compare and contrast how other regions budget for specific policy delivery, how can we assess our levels of spending? Some of our Departments have fully committed to the idea of benchmarking while others are ignoring it. Will the Finance Minister put policies in place to encourage all Departments to carry out that type of budgetary testing?

In addition to benchmarking, we should make it a requirement for public services to be market-tested to ensure that value for money is delivered to the taxpayer. The Finance Minister's colleagues have shown their support for the A5 project, which is being supported by a significant contribution from Dublin, and I hope that the Finance Minister will encourage all Departments to engage in further collaboration with their counterparts in the Irish Government to deliver further projects for local people in Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that there is significant untapped potential in that approach? I would also like to see improved correspondence between Ministers and their counterparts in the South in order to better identify where co-operation can save money for the Northern Ireland public purse — money that can otherwise be reallocated to front line services, such as nurses and teachers.

I will take this opportunity to continue to focus the Minister's attention on the alarming cost of division to this society. I know that my colleague Mrs Kelly referred to it earlier, but an estimated £1 billion could be saved if we were to get serious about tackling segregation in our society. If the Minister is truly committed to seeking to reform our public services to tackle waste, he need look no further than reducing the cost of division in Northern Ireland. Does the Finance Minister have any plans to require Departments to policy-proof their budgets in respect of the cost of maintaining a divided society? That would help us not only to identify the depth and scale of the problem but to deliver efficiencies on the scale needed for genuine economic recovery and the creation of first-class public services in Northern Ireland.

5.45 pm

Mr Agnew: A huge opportunity appears to have been lost in the Budget. As has been mentioned, we have not yet seen the Programme for Government. I fully expect that when we do, it, like the previous Programme for Government, will highlight the economy as one of the priorities of the Assembly term; and rightly so. However, we cannot take the economy in isolation; it is not separate from other environmental and social issues.

We have a plan to generate income for Northern Ireland; to create jobs; to move Northern Ireland into a low-carbon economy; and to improve its people's quality of life. That plan is the green new deal, and I know that the Minister is aware of it. I appreciate that, in a former role, the Minister said that he would not take lectures from bearded, muesli-munching, 'Guardian' reading, sandal-wearing environmentalists. I apologise if I have misquoted him and left anything out.

Mr Wilson: That is quite accurate.

Mr Agnew: Thank you. I appreciate that he said that. However, if we have a plan that has not only been endorsed by such people as Friends of the Earth and the Northern Ireland Environment Link, but by groups such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Institute of Directors (IOD), the Ulster Farmers' Union, Bryson House — to name but a few of the signatories of the green new deal — I hope that the Minister would take lectures from those people because they are economic and environmental experts.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member praises the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors and implores the Minister of Finance to listen to experts. Will the Member take the same view when, next week, the Assembly debates corporation tax? Will he listen to the voices of the CBI, the IoD and economic experts on his much-vaunted opposition to corporation tax? Perhaps, at that stage, they will become economically illiterate.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his question. I agree absolutely: it is important to listen to experts; however, we must listen to all experts and not be selective. Therefore, equally, I will listen to PricewaterhouseCoopers, which has reservations about the cut in corporation tax. Indeed, I will listen to the Minister of Finance

himself, who, it is well known, has reservations about the cut in corporation tax. In fact, the First Minister once said that the current Minister of Finance is the most qualified that we have ever had. Therefore, if he has reservations, I ask that his party also listen to him.

I return to the green new deal. Four million pounds has been set aside for a pilot scheme, which, we are told, will be funded through revenue generated from the plastic bag tax. It just goes to show that whenever sustainability is discussed in the Assembly, there is really no understanding of its meaning and purpose. Seeking to generate a set revenue from the plastic bag tax suggests that we are not using it for the purpose for which it was originally intended.

The green new deal could create jobs, reduce people's household bills, and cut carbon use. As I said, when we debate the Programme for Government, I suspect that the Assembly's priorities will be to tackle economic, social and environmental issues. Therefore, a scheme that meets all three of those aims is exactly the type of scheme that we should look towards and fund properly.

The Member mentioned corporation tax. Although we have a Budget before us, I do not know how much stock we can put in it if it is passed. If we cut corporation tax, we will have to look at the Budget again because of the massive loss of revenue that will occur as a result. A decision on cutting corporation tax has yet to be made, but a number of parties have announced that they are in favour of it.

There are absolutely no guarantees with a cut in corporation tax, yet the green new deal brings guarantees of job creation. We seek to put in place a pilot scheme, but there have been pilot schemes. There was a pilot scheme in the Republic of Ireland, in which 50,000 homes were insulated and thousands of jobs created. There have been pilot schemes in England, in which people's homes have been insulated, they have saved money and jobs have been created. I do not see why we need a Northern Ireland-specific pilot scheme when there are examples on these islands of how it can be implemented and of the benefits that it will bring.

I mentioned sustainability. It is clear to me that sustainability is not at the heart of this Budget. We still spend over 80% of the transport budget on private transport and less than 19%

on public transport and improving our public transport infrastructure. We have to address that. In England, the figure for spend on public transport is more like 60%. In the Republic of Ireland, they are moving towards spending two thirds of their transport budget on public transport. We are nowhere near that.

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

I would love to say, and I would love the Minister to be able to say, that that is because we have such fantastic public transport infrastructure, are light years ahead of other regions of the UK and Ireland, have put the investment in and, therefore, are now just maintaining an otherwise excellent system. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We are one of the most car-dependent countries in the whole of Europe. We must seek to address that, because, as Members will know, oil prices are rising. We, as an Assembly and a Government, should be putting the infrastructure in place to help readdress that. At the minute, families are crippled by the amount of money that they have to spend on fuel. We are not providing them with an effective alternative, and we really must do so.

We have to put sustainability at the heart of our Budget and Programme for Government. The economy does not operate in isolation. The decisions that we make affect not just the economy but people in their homes. They affect the environment in which those people live, and that is the crux of it. When I talk about the environment, I am talking about the environment in which people live, right down to their home environment. We have the opportunity to address that, and we should address it.

Another issue that has been dodged is water charges, which I know is controversial. We, in the Assembly, have so many needs to meet. We are told that there is not enough money for so much of what has been talked about in today's debate. Not having any form of usage-based water charging costs the Assembly £200 million a year. We cannot shy away from that, and we have to look at it. We should absolutely look at how we protect the most vulnerable and ensure that those on the lowest incomes do not have their taps turned off. No one wants that, and I certainly do not advocate it.

We can provide an allowance so that families can meet their hygiene and drinking water needs, while we tackle water wastage, as we will be required to do by Europe, and ensure,

particularly in these difficult times, that those who can afford to pay do pay and shoulder that bit more of the burden to ensure that the most vulnerable in society have the investment in the public services that they need, such as the Health Service, the education system and the public transport system, which I have already mentioned. We really need to address that and stop shying away from it.

One final issue that we failed to address is that of student fees. The current Budget means that we must do one of three things, none of which I find particularly palatable.

First, we could put student fees up. However, in other debates we have heard the many reasons why we do not want to do that, why we want to keep our best and brightest in Northern Ireland and ensure that those on a lower income who have the ability can still have the opportunity to avail themselves of a university education.

The second alternative is cutting funding to our universities. However, I do not think that we would want to do that either, as we are rightly proud of our universities and want to continue to be so.

The third alternative is to give more money to the Department to ensure that we do not have to put up student fees in Northern Ireland, and that should be a priority. We are talking about growing our economy, and the various reports on corporation tax show that most companies, when deciding where to invest, place the skills of a workforce ahead of the rate of corporation tax in their list of priorities. We must ensure that we have quality universities providing the quality graduates required to ensure that we get investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wilson: I thank all those Members who have sat through this marathon session. We have had the Budget debate so many times that it is like a repeat on the BBC. It does not get any better with repetition; nevertheless, we have gone through the issues time and again. This is about the fifth time that we have had the same discussion about the Budget, and Members still raise the same points and set themselves up for the same responses. However, one of the roles of the Assembly is to have discussions on the Budget.

I always welcome a good debate. When we have an open-ended debate such as this one, in which people are not restricted by

the customary five minutes, we have useful discussions and exchanges. Some Members respond; others do not. Therefore, despite what others have said about the standard of debate here, when we get the correct format, it can be as good as anywhere else. To those naysayers in the Assembly, and those who think that it is a pointless exercise for us to sit here and debate, I say that, if they had the patience to sit through the almost six hours of debate today, they would have heard an interesting exchange of views and a useful debate.

Mr Hamilton: It is as good as any council.

Mr Wilson: Yes, as the Member beside me said, it is as good as any council debate. Indeed, looking across the Floor, I am sure that Mr McCann would tell us that it is as good as, if not better than, any debate that we ever had in Belfast City Council over the years.

I want to address some of the points that Members raised. The Chairman of the Committee for Finance and Personnel spoke in the debate, and I welcome the fact that the Committee agreed to the use of accelerated passage for the Bill. It was important that we were able to use that mechanism so that the Bill can receive Royal Assent by the end of July and we can have the money for the second part of the year.

The Chairman pointed out that the current process is cumbersome and repetitive. I am not sure that it deals with the crux of what we want to do when it comes to debating the Budget. Therefore, I welcome the fact that he said that the Committee will engage with my officials on the two changes that we need to make. The first of those changes is to the Budget process itself. We must decide whether we need all the stages, which tend to be repetitive. Perhaps they should not be repetitive, but people tend to see them all merging into one.

Can we improve the process?

6.00 pm

Secondly, and more importantly, a number of Members said that the presentation of the data — the information — is not all that clear. I will return later to what some of them said. As I said in last week's debate, and despite what Mr Allister said, I am not worried that people can: one, understand what is in the figures; two, see clearly where the money is going and what

it is for; and, three, then have an opportunity to discuss that. I look forward to engaging with the Committee in looking not only at the process but at the presentation of the Budget information.

Unfortunately, my successor will then have to live with the consequences of that. It will probably take about a year and a half for the new process to be in put in place, and Members will then have far greater clarity and be able to sharpen their pencils, point their swords and have a go at the Minister, because they will fully understand what is in the figures. I am glad that my "assistant", as he has been described, although I prefer to call him my apprentice, will have that joy in a year and a half's time.

Mr Girvan talked about the fact that, as a result of Budget decisions, we have some of the lowest rates in the United Kingdom. In fact he was wrong: we have the lowest rates. Some people say that that is good, others say that it is bad, and some people from the leafy suburbs of north Down and the affluent Green Party and its supporters believe that we should be charging people more. We have taken the view that low taxation is good. It is good for individuals. People know better how to spend their money and should be left with as much of it as possible to spend, rather than having it spent by the Government. Hence, we have kept the increase in the regional rate to the rate of inflation and have not imposed water charges in this mandate. I have said that we will hold to that.

Mr Hussey is not here. However, I am glad that the Ulster Unionist Party has made clear its intention not to vote against the Budget this time. We are progressing a little with the party to my right. The last time that we debated the Budget — do not worry, it is basically the same Budget — we had fury from Members from that party. They said that the Budget was not fit for purpose, that people would be dying in the streets and that the country would come to a halt. At least they have moderated their stance and will not divide the House, although I do not know whether that means that they will vote for the Budget.

I listened to Mr Hussey, who I think must have been spending too much time with the Secretary of State, because, although we saw the face of Mr Hussey, we heard the voice of Owen Paterson. We got the whole lot. We heard how much we spend a minute; how much we borrow

a minute; what size the deficit is; and how much is spent per capita in Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. It could have been the Secretary of State speaking. After an introduction like that, had he said that he was going to vote against the Budget, he would have been laughed out of the House. At least he had the good grace to say that his party would not oppose the motion.

Mr Hussey did, however, raise a number of issues about Belfast port, as did a number of other Members. He spoke about the £40 million to be raised from it, and he mentioned the housing associations and the £80 million that we require from them. We will not take £80 million off housing associations but will simply require them to use £80 million of their own money to build houses, and the grant that they will get from government will be reduced. That will not be a big imposition on them. The SDLP originally proposed that measure. Then the SDLP condemned me for it and said that it would never work. I am now pleased to hear that the Minister of the Environment, who was the Minister for Social Development and who is an SDLP Member, has said that, actually, this measure can work. He claims that it is due to his great work. I do not really care whether it is due to his great work with the housing associations, or who did it. As I claimed in the Budget debates, it has shown that that is robust funding.

Mr Hussey also stated that the Health Department would have a deficit of £177 million at the end of this year. That is a vast improvement. It just shows what six weeks of a DUP Minister can do. When a Minister from the Ulster Unionist Party was in charge, the deficit was going to be £400-and-something million next year. Within six weeks of the appointment of a DUP Minister who had some interest in the Department, the deficit that the former Minister predicted has been reduced by more than 50%, even according to the party that condemned me for laying the Health Service to waste. I am sure that good work will be done while living within that budget. However, we have given a commitment that we will help with that.

I am glad that the terms of reference for PEDU's going into the Health Service are now with the Department. I hope that they will be agreed, which will allow PEDU to get on with the job of helping the Minister to live within his budget. He will be capable of taking the

required hard decisions. Life will not be easy for any Department, but, as Mr Hussey said, more eloquently than I could, that is a result of decisions that have been made outside the House. It has nothing to do with the incompetence of the Assembly, the alleged dysfunctionality of the Executive or the inability of the Finance Department to keep a grip on the Budget.

Mr Hussey also raised the issue of the part-time Reserve gratuity, and I will say something about that later. I share the concern that the issue has dragged on for some time, but I understand from the Justice Minister that the payments will commence shortly, and I hope that that happens.

Mr Bradley raised a number of issues. Despite comments from SDLP Members who spoke after Mr Bradley, I am pleased that he said that the SDLP will not divide the House. I am glad that all the people who opposed the Budget with such fury have been converted. I think that the leader of the SDLP may have wanted me to give way. Maybe she was going to tell me that she was not converted. If she wants me to give way, I will do so in a moment or two. Significantly, of course, the Budget has not changed. All that has changed is that the election is over. That is what it was all about. It was not about whether the Budget was right or wrong or whether more money could be found. There was a forthcoming election, and people wanted to score points. What a splendid tactic that was, as can be seen in the reduction of one Minister for the Ulster Unionist Party and in the number of seats for the SDLP. Maybe those parties will think twice about trying that tactic again. In any case, they will not divide the House and are now quite happy that the Budget should be passed. I am pleased; that is progress.

Mr Bradley also spoke about the amount of new money and moneys still to be raised. His leader also raised that issue and, in fact, went further. At least he asked how much new money there is. Nine hundred million pounds of new money will be raised over the four-year period. He hinted that that is not realisable. His party leader went a bit further and talked about being alarmed at the slippage already. When I asked her what that slippage is — do not forget, we are only about eight or nine weeks into the new four-year Budget period in which these assets and this money will be realised — the only example I could get was Crossnacreevy. Crossnacreevy was an issue away at the

beginning of the previous mandate, and it was not even a matter of slippage anyway; it was money that was never realised, but it did not affect — and I will make this clear because Mr Allister was at this one as well; it was one of his herd of sacred cows that we heard about —

Mr Allister: Pedigree.

Mr Wilson: I do not think that they were pedigree cows; that is the thing. They were old mongrel cows, because we have heard them all before. If there is such a thing as a mongrel cow; I am sure you could correct me, Mr Deputy Speaker, because you are a cow man. *[Laughter.]* As opposed to some other people in this House, who are cowboys.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister to be careful with his language and to be careful of what he says of the Deputy Speaker.

Mr Wilson: I was only observing that you would probably be more aware of the pedigree and the background of cows than I would, as I observe every morning as I look across the valley.

Where was I? I was on about these sacred cows, and the slippage in this money. A number of Members raised this point, so I will say that we will have to keep on top of the revenue-raising proposals in this Budget. That is why the Budget review group will meet regularly to get reports. Do not forget, much of this will be built into the departmental savings plans as well. There is also a role for Committees to question officials and Ministers as to how they are progressing. There is a job for my Department, for me, for the Executive, for the Budget review group of the Executive and for Members of this Assembly to make sure that this is delivered. I will be giving a six-monthly report to the Assembly as to how the departmental saving plans and the revenue-raising proposals are going.

Mr Bradley also raised the issue of the Scottish Futures Trust, which is really a PPP scheme, albeit one that, because it is a non-profit distributing model for PFI contracts, should, in theory anyway, work out cheaper. I have to say, and I have made this point time and again, I am pleased that the direction of travel that the left-wing socialist party — *[Interruption.]* I hope that that is not a bell telling me to shut up.

Mr Hamilton: Or a car reversing; that is what it sounded like.

Mr Wilson: Or a car reversing.

I am glad to see that the SDLP, which waves its left-wing credentials, etc, now accepts that models of private involvement in what used to be public sector provision can actually be beneficial. Its members probably do not want to tell their trade union friends too much about that, but at least they are throwing out some of these ideas. I know that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have spoken to the Scottish First Minister and Finance Minister about the Scottish Futures Trust model. I do not know how applicable it will be here, but, as I have said, we will not rule out any new sources of finance.

Mr Bradley and a number of other Members raised the issue of revenue from Belfast harbour. We have put in £20 million in each of the past two years. The Minister for Regional Development is working with Belfast Harbour Commissioners to see how that money can be paid over to the Executive, and, as I have said before, if that requires legislation through this House, we will use it. It should not be in jeopardy at all; the reason why we put it towards the end of the Budget period was because it allowed us to do that.

6.15 pm

Anna Lo raised the importance of the voluntary sector's role, and I agree with her, although I do not believe that the voluntary sector is sustainable in its present form. Just as we look for better delivery from private contracts and from government, we must look for better delivery from the voluntary sector. However, one of the reasons for the four-year Budget is that the voluntary sector must have some certainty so that it can plan.

As I have said in the past, there is a role for both the voluntary and social economy sectors to help us deliver on some of the Departments' savings plans. It is up to those two sectors to sell what they have to Ministers, administrators, Departments, etc. I hope that the statutory sector will be open to different ways of doing things, because, as Mr McCarthy said, we cannot keep on doing what we are doing using the current methods and framework.

Ms Lo and others raised the issue of the DCAL budget. There is talk going about that the DCAL budget has been very severely hit. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport was hit with a 25% cut, as a result of decisions made at Westminster. That was passed on to

us as a reduction of the same size, but we did not cut the DCAL budget by 25% or anything like it. The cut was approximately half of what the Barnett consequential indicated. When it comes to the Arts Council part of the DCAL budget, its reduction in funding is 5.6% by the fourth year of the Budget period. It is hoped that the Arts Council will benefit from lottery funding from 2011-12. That should complement the settlement. I agree with what Ms Lo said.

Mr Allister suggested that, if you want to concentrate on the economy, you must build factories. It is a short-sighted view of life that insists that, if you want to build the economy, you should have a narrow focus on factories or something like that. When we set the Budget, we set it on the basis that we have to provide for the whole range of services required in Northern Ireland. Many of those, although they might seem soft and a bit woolly, bring hard economic benefits. If you want to attract tourism, you have to have high-class sporting and arts facilities.

Time and time again, we are told in this House that Ministers must think cross-departmentally and that we cannot have a silo mentality. Yet Mr Allister was at it, as was Ms Ritchie and some of the rest of them, saying things like, "We need a Programme for Government so that we can think holistically". Then, when you think holistically, people get into these wee cubbyholes and say, "No, if it is the economy, it has to be factories" or something like that. You cannot have it both ways. Indeed, during previous debates, I have made it clear that I am sympathetic to the economic potential of the arts. Despite what Anna Lo has said about the reduction, we tried to protect that budget, even though we took a much bigger hit, and we hope that that budget will be supplemented.

Mr Campbell raised a number of issues. He spoke of the cost to the public purse of empty homes. He is quite right; that cost is enormous, especially in some areas where empty homes become the centre of antisocial behaviour, an eyesore and a nuisance in the community, and cause all sorts of problems for nearby properties. The Minister is now considering whether more emphasis should be placed on the existing housing stock. A good headline was created for the previous two Social Development Ministers in that they produced a record number of new homes and newbuilds, yet what we do with the existing stock can be equally important

in providing homes for people and regenerating run-down areas. That is important; we have to think of it holistically.

I know that the imposition of rates on empty homes has not been popular, and I have had quite a lot of angry letters about it, but my Department will start to do that in October. Some people say that if a house is not being lived in, there is no cost, but if a house is not being lived in, there is often more cost.

Mr F McCann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a minute or two. One reason for introducing rates on empty homes is to try to get those houses back into use rather than have them lying empty. There is no cost if you leave them empty.

Mr F McCann: We spoke about that issue at the Social Development Committee meeting last week. It has been said that there are some 40,000 empty houses, but that figure was arrived at in 2008 at the start of the economic crisis. In many areas, huge numbers of houses have become empty since that time. Would it not be better if another survey were carried out to find out how many houses are empty? That 2008 figure has been criticised.

Mr Wilson: I do not know the exact figure, but the Member makes a good point. If those homes already exist, why do we put hundreds of millions of pounds into building more houses and leave that dereliction? I accept that those houses are not always derelict, but nevertheless, they are a resource that could be used. If we can give encouragement either through capital spending on houses to improve and regenerate areas or by persuading owners to do something with them, we should.

Mr Campbell also raised the issue of employment patterns in public services. He said that there was under-representation in a number of areas, and he welcomed the improvement in the Housing Executive. I look forward to the day when what is to me a fairly sterile debate about the proportions of this or of that section of the community who are employed in public or private services or whatever no longer matters, and we simply chose people on the basis of their ability to do a job. Although I understand Mr Campbell's argument that, in the past, under-representation of one community meant a song and a dance being made so why is that not the case when there is under-representation

of another community, I think that we have to move to a point at which we accept that people are chosen on the basis that they are good at their job and have the qualifications to do it, and we ignore their ethnic, religious or any other background. I get sick and tired of the whingeing from these pressure groups that want to make an issue just so they can justify their own existence, when what we should focus on is people's ability to do a job.

Mr Bradley and Mr Flanagan mentioned progress on the social protection fund and the social investment fund, as well as the childcare strategy. Those strategies rest with OFMDFM, and I understand that it is putting proposals on the social inclusion fund out to public consultation this summer. The terms of the social protection fund are still being considered, and it will be up to the Department to consider the merits of each proposal, including the mortgage rescue scheme that was mentioned. The childcare strategy is being developed through the work of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. That will come before the Executive for consideration.

Mr McQuillan raised the issue of tourism, as did other Members, including Mr Humphrey. The figure of £455 million, which is how much tourists spend in Belfast, indicates the potential that there is in tourism, and it is something that we have to work at. That is not the only reason why we are alarmed at the rise in air passenger duty; there are much more important reasons. I will say something about that later on.

Mr McQuillan also raised the issue of guaranteed policing costs over the next four years. I am pleased to say that not only have we secured access to that but we have had it agreed by the Treasury that that £200 million can be built into the police budget and does not have to be applied for on a year-on-year basis. That money has been allocated for the next four years, and the police can now use it, which gives them flexibility in their budget, especially when dealing with terrorist activity.

Mr McNarry, tongue in cheek, welcomed my reappointment and said that he looked forward to the standard of debate.

Mr Hamilton: He said it with massive enthusiasm.

Mr Wilson: It was, as the Member said, said with massive enthusiasm.

Mr McNarry, like Mr Hussey, indicated that the Ulster Unionist Party has put up the white flag as far as the Budget is concerned.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I knew that that would get a response, and I am happy to take the Member's intervention.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for giving way. He keeps making this point about a change of heart. Does he not remember that in March this Budget was approved, that the Ulster Unionist Party voted against it at that stage and that we are now facing reality? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wilson: What an admission: in March, the Ulster Unionists lived in a fantasy land, but now they have come down to earth and are facing reality. The only fantasy land, as I pointed out earlier, was the fact that there was an election. It was not a fantasy election, and it certainly was not a fantastic election either for them, and they may now regret the stance that they took.

Before the election, the fury of the Ulster Unionist Party was about how much money we needed for the Health Service. We were told that only health mattered. I had a copy of its manifesto somewhere, but I have lost it. In its manifesto, that party said that it would defend the Health Service. However, now that Mr McNarry is the Chairman of the Education Committee, we have not heard a word about health today: it was all about the £300 million required for education. That shows the difficulty that we have in debates like this: it really depends on the positions that people hold as to how much they will fight for a particular service. The one thing that they do know — *[Interruption.]*

Mr I McCrea: The big guns are in now.

Mr Hamilton: No, it is just Basil.

Mr Wilson: At least he did not take part in the debate today. I do not know if he is coming in now to upbraid me for saying nasty things about the fantasy world that his party, according to Mr Cree, lived in before the election. I hope he is not coming in to tell me what he wants to do with Invest NI's budget like he did the last time.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not. He is only in the door, and he wants to hog the Floor. Make him sit for a wee while. Since it will take me about two hours to get through all this, maybe I will let him make an intervention at the end of the two hours. That way at least he will have earned the right to make an intervention. He certainly has not earned the right to make an intervention after 30 seconds. He has been in for 30 seconds and wants to take part in the debate. No chance. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: No comments from a sedentary position, please.

Mr Wilson: Now that the focus of his attention and concern is on education and not health, Mr McNarry raised the issue of the education budget. I accept that the education budget, like all other budgets, is tight. However, as he will be aware, in the June monitoring round today, over £20 million was allocated to help with the end-year flexibility issue with schools to safeguard their budgets. PEDU is working on the second stage of looking for efficiencies in the education budget. It is looking at catering and school transport.

There are budgets in there of over £100 million. From the benchmarking that has been done among different boards, we believe that substantial savings are to be made, and we are prepared to work with the Department on that.

6.30 pm

Mr Campbell raised the issue of schools capital, particularly in the north-west. I know that the Department of Education will have to consider its capital funds very carefully and make allocations based on that.

We then come to Mr Ramsey, who raised the issue of the depletion of resources in DEL. I have to say that, again, I was a bit disappointed with his contribution, which showed a short-sighted view. Not only was it short-sighted but it ignored where his party stands on the matter. Let me make something clear: the DEL budget got an increase of 3.1% in cash terms. That was one of the three budgets that got an increase over the budgetary period. Therefore, it was one that we recognised, because training and making people ready for work will be part of the economic recovery. However, on the one hand, Mr Ramsey says that he is against an increase in student fees. On the other hand, he says that we have already imposed far too many efficiency

savings on the higher education sector. In fact, his argument is that there has been sustained underinvestment.

This is where things are difficult for me. I do not mind parties having a go about Budget provision, but they should at least be consistent. A party might have a priority; for example, health used to be a priority for the Ulster Unionist Party, but now it is not. Its priority is now education. If DEL is the priority for the SDLP, that is fine, and I would expect its Members to make those arguments. However, I read that party's submission on the Budget. Do not forget that Mr Ramsey, who I assume was speaking on behalf of his party, contended that there has been sustained underinvestment in higher education. When the SDLP was lobbying me on the Budget, it proposed that, over the next four years and on top of the savings that have already been made, we should take around £38.5 million out of higher education. It stated:

"Over recent years and decades, universities have enjoyed expansion both in student numbers and budgets. The government is now under pressure to maintain funding for universities and the option being recommended by the coalition government in Britain is to allow universities to double or even treble their student fees. The SDLP believes this is completely the wrong approach. Universities must make serious attempts to tighten their own belts".

That means that universities have had lots of investment over the past decades, so they should tighten their belts. On the one hand, that is what Mr Ramsey's party tells me when it writes to me, but, when he stands up and wants to make comments on the Budget, he says the exact opposite. It is difficult, Mr Deputy Speaker, to hear those kinds of mixed messages from the party on the opposite Benches. You would think that it would at least try to get some consistency into its message.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, it is all right.

I mentioned tourism, which Mr Humphrey raised, but he also discussed NAMA. As I have told the Assembly on a number of occasions, every time that I meet with the Ministers from the Republic, NAMA is raised. I also meet with officials from NAMA, and I will be doing so again some time in the next couple of weeks. The various issues that Mr Humphrey highlighted will be raised with them, and raised regularly.

Mr Humphrey also raised the issue of air passenger duty. That is an important issue not just for tourism but, perhaps more importantly, for the economic development strategy. That direct link with North America is very important in the economic strategy for inward investment that Arlene Foster is pursuing in DETI. We put a number of proposals to the Government at Westminster. She and I have held meetings with the Government. We were a bit disappointed that they did not make some proposal in the Budget other than that they are prepared to review the air passenger duty issue, and we are engaging with them in that review.

I suppose that there are three options. The first is to make available to Northern Ireland the same arrangements as in the Highlands and Islands, which are exempt because of their unique position. Another option is to have a flat rate rather than the banded rate, and bring that rate down, which, of course, would save substantially on transatlantic travel. The last option is to allow the matter to be devolved to this Assembly, which can then decide whether, as a priority, it would rather devote resources to not having a high passenger duty and keep the airline viable. Of course, that would then have to come from other parts of the Budget.

He also raised the issue of enterprise zones. I am sure that he was thinking of some places in north Belfast. We will be keeping an eye on that. We are not very clear on what enterprise zones will mean in the rest of the United Kingdom. Most of what I have heard about fewer planning restrictions, rates holidays, additional grants, access to broadband, etc, are devolved issues, and we could probably do that ourselves. Whether or not you want to confine that to particular parts of Northern Ireland, with the kind of distortion that that can lead to in trade and industrial location, is a matter that we have to look at.

Mr Humphrey also raised the issue of unemployment in the local economy, as did a number of other Members. The Budget does provide money for longer-term projects, 20,000 jobs over the Budget period, new jobs created by the actions of DETI, and £19 million, which should create short-term jobs, with 4,000 of those being created by March 2014.

I congratulate Mrs Hale on her maiden speech, and we look forward to hearing more of her contributions in the Assembly. All of us

recognise the difficult circumstances that led to her involvement in politics but, having gone through that experience, and the feeling that there was in the way in which she believed, first of all, that a party should react to the difficulties experienced by constituents, and how she found that helpful, I have absolutely no doubt from her speech that that is the kind of commitment she will give to Lagan Valley. I look forward to more of her contributions to debates, and welcome her maiden speech.

She made a point about the educational difficulties that the children of serving Army personnel face. Allowances are very often made in school budgets for other people, for example for Travellers' children who move about and, therefore, have difficulties. There is also a need to recognise that additional resources are required for the children of serving Army personnel whose lives are equally disrupted, and who have the other worry that their dad or mum may not come home from the job that they have gone to do for their country. It is important that that is considered in the education budget, and in allocations to school budgets.

She also raised the issue of schools in Dromore. I know that the Education Minister has to look at his capital budget, and I am sure she will be making very forceful representations in her pleasant way to the Education Minister about schools in her constituency.

Mr McCarthy raised the issue of health spending. I heard the list of areas in health that he believed should not be cut. That is the great thing. I love people saying, "Yes, something must be done but not in this, this, this, this and this." Then you ask, "Actually, where should it be done?" I did ask him to respond, and he thought he had answered the question — maybe it was because I smiled at him when he gave the answer — but he had not really. I know where he does not want the reductions to be made. I know that he has now publicly accepted that changes need to be made, and we look forward to hearing where those changes should come from.

Mr Swann raised the issues of the Irish language Act, special advisers and agriculture. I have total sympathy with his view on the Irish language Act. It is an issue that, because of the safeguards in the Assembly, will require cross-community support, and I therefore have no doubt that it will not progress any further than the Minister's desk. He made an

important point. Leave aside the Irish language Act, which is contentious, and will not have cross-community support, and therefore will not be going through this Assembly. Every new commitment that is made in the Assembly will have financial implications.

Time and time again, in response to situations, Members come in here and propose this, that and the other. We always have to remember that, when we want to make those kinds of changes, there are financial implications and, in tight budgetary situations, we should at least be considering where we get the money from. However, I appreciate the points that he made.

He also raised the issue of special advisers. That is something that I am dealing with, and a report will be available shortly. That report will take into consideration the views and the anger that have been expressed by the community.

He also raised the issue of DARD getting its pluses and minuses wrong. It was a clerical error. It sought less cash from the Assembly. When it was spotted, the adjustments were made. There was no consequence as a result of that, other than a bit of embarrassment for the Minister and the Department. It did not result in grants not being paid or capital schemes not going ahead. It was simply a mistake, but it should not have happened, and my officials are going to work with DARD to ensure that it does not happen in the future.

Ms Ritchie raised the issue about where we are with revenue raising and suggested that there were signs of slippage. I have already pointed out that she has not been able to give one example of that, and I suppose —

Ms Ritchie: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is my understanding that there has already been slippage around the money that would probably be raised from plastic bags. There has also been slippage with land sales and house sales. Will he confirm that that is the case and that what was projected has not been realised even in this short time frame?

Mr Wilson: First of all, during the early stages of the Budget discussions here, I indicated that we would not be realising the £4 million from the plastic bags tax this year, and, therefore, it is not in the Budget. It is not a slippage at all;

it was a recognition that it was not going to be done and we were not going to be able to get the means of collecting the tax through in this year.

As far as the sale of assets is concerned, I am sure that the Member will realise that you do not say that you want to raise £10 million this year, and there are 50 weeks in the year, therefore you raise £200,000 every week, and if you have not raised £200,000 every week, there is slippage. That is not the way it works. Many of those are large, discrete sales, and, therefore, the money will be raised in one lump. Given the negotiations that have to take place, I think even she will accept that that cannot be done in the first week or month of any particular year. All I can say, and I have said it time and time again, is that the situation will be monitored. If there are signs of slippage, of course it will be of concern to us and we will have to look at how the situation can be remedied.

6.45 pm

Ms Ritchie also upbraided me for not accepting the SDLP's detailed proposals for raising revenue. If I were her, I would be embarrassed about raising those proposals, because they have been raised so many times before. She wants us to sell the car parks. The car parks are making us money, but she wants us to sell them anyway. The SDLP wants us to privatise the MOT centres. That is a possibility, but any time that we talk about selling anything off and it comes to the practicalities, her party is opposed to it.

Ms Ritchie wants us to sell the Speaker's house. I do not know whether that is his house or the one down at the gate. I loved the next one: the SDLP wants us to get money — £120 million — from planning gain. The SDLP says that planning gain can realise £20 million this year; £30 million next year; £30 million the following year; and £40 million the year after that. It then admits:

"The fact that there is a recession in construction and development is no reason not to have this facility on the statute book."

The SDLP wants it on the statute book. We will not realise any money, according to the SDLP's proposals. However, when we look at the figures that the SDLP put forward, there is £20 million to be got this year. On one hand, the development industry is in recession and cannot afford to contribute any money; on the other hand, it can put £20 million into the Budget this

year, £30 million next year, and so forth. The reason why we have not accepted a great deal of advice from the SDLP is because, even by its own admission, its proposals do not make sense and do not realise money.

The SDLP wants us to sell an airport that does not belong to us. It wants £37 million from the sale of Londonderry Airport or Derry City Airport or whatever you want to call it. It really does not matter what it is called; the SDLP wants to call it ours, but it is someone else's. Those are daft proposals. Ms Ritchie glibly stands up and says that we have ignored the sterling advice of the SDLP, but it is not a bit of wonder.

The other proposal is that we could solve the problems of water through water service mutualisation. I love that word. Somehow or other, it hides all that lies behind it. The SDLP is against water charges, but it says that we could get money for the water service through water service mutualisation. How will the mutual company raise money? It will borrow it. What will the mutual company borrow that money against? It will borrow it against revenue. Where does that revenue come from? The revenue has to come from the customers, because it is not coming from us. The whole point is to get rid of it so that we do not have to pay the money any more. Mutualisation seems brilliant until you ask how it will actually work. Mutualisation is code for giving responsibility to another body so that someone else will impose water charges. That is one of the reasons why we have not gone down that route. There may well have to be a debate on that matter in future, but the Member wants to have it both ways.

She also asked how the Budget would help the economy and jobs. There is a severe reduction in the Budget, but the Executive took the decision to switch £256 million from current spending to capital spending to assist the local construction industry. By the final year of this Budget, because of the measures that we have taken and the sales receipts from assets that are no longer of any use to us and from which we will realise the money, we will be able to spend £1.4 billion on capital spending, which is in keeping with the long-term trends. In addition, we will proactively try to help businesses by keeping rates down to the level of inflation, adopting the proposal for small business rate relief and capping manufacturing rates at 30%. The SDLP was opposed to that and wanted us to leave it.

Mrs Kelly raised the issue of energy costs. She made a very good point, because we should be concerned about the way in which energy costs in Northern Ireland are going up. Mr Agnew made the same point. As energy costs go up, of course the industries that are heavily reliant on energy become less competitive. Also, of course, it leads to an increase in fuel poverty. However, when I look again at the SDLP's energy proposals — the Green Party is no different, by the way — I notice the emphasis on pressing:

“for a renewed commitment to a low carbon society from all government departments and ministers. We will strive for ambitious, legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of 40 by 2020 and 80 by 2050, to be met through a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act.”

But what is the source of increased energy charges? Nearly 80% of the increase in energy charges is coming as a result of switching from cheaper carbon sources to dearer renewable sources.

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a moment or two. Before I give way to the Member, since he seems to be so enthused by what the business community thinks about his green proposals, I will tell him what Sir Roger Carr, of the CBI, said only this week. As a result of targets, energy costs are rising for industry, causing businesses to relocate outside the United Kingdom. He said that companies are:

“under threat from punitive green energy costs.”

That is what the chairman of the CBI in the United Kingdom said. The figures stack up for themselves. You cannot argue, on one hand, for the kind of environment policy that the SDLP and the Green Party are arguing for and, at the same time, complain about energy costs going up.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. Surely the Minister will accept that the main factor in rising energy costs is the fact that the cost of oil and gas continue to rise as they run out, and, by investing in renewable energy in the short term, we will make long-term savings, which will increase in comparison with the rise of oil and gas prices.

As regards the comments from the CBI, I am on record opposing the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government's introduction of the carbon reduction tax, which took away

the incentive that was proposed initially for companies to switch to green energy. Instead, they just proposed a flat tax, which the Green Party opposed. I wanted to clarify that point for the Minister's knowledge.

Mr Wilson: We could trade figures on the efficiency of renewable energy sources all day, but that is not the purpose of the debate, and I am sure that you would pull me up, Mr Deputy Speaker, if I began to go down that route. Indeed, it might be useful to have an informed debate on that subject in the Assembly, rather than the kind of rhetoric that states that wind comes for nothing and, therefore, you get cheap electricity. Windmills operate at a very low level of efficiency. They require a feed-in and a whole network. They require billions of pounds of investment. Do not forget that the subsidy for that form of energy comes from consumers' energy bills and impacts on the cost of energy for industry. There is no point in complaining about it while saying that you want more of the policy that leads to it.

Mrs Kelly also raised the cost-per-prisoner issue. I am sure that the Justice Minister will focus on that area. I hope that she gives him the same support in his battle to get the cost of legal aid in Northern Ireland down to the same level as that in other parts of the United Kingdom. Perhaps the SDLP is a bit more selective because of the Member who sits to her left. I do not know.

Ms Ritchie also spoke about road and street lighting. She will be very pleased to see that, in the June monitoring round, £3 million is made available to the Department for Regional Development for the testing of street lighting systems.

Ms Ritchie: Thank you, Minister, for giving way. Although I acknowledge the money that is in the June monitoring round, that was not the specific issue that I raised. It was much more fundamental and relates to private residential estates where there has been non-adoption because of the inability of developers to fulfil their work and schemes, owing to, shall we say, a lack of funding opportunities because banks have not been providing credit for them. As a consequence, residents in those estates feel deeply frustrated. I was suggesting, because of the bond issues involved, that you, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, act in conjunction with the Minister for Regional Development, who

is already equipped with the information, to try to bring a resolution to the table.

Mr Wilson: I am sorry; I took the Member up wrongly on that point. Every Member in the Chamber will probably be aware of the kinds of issues that she has raised. People who have bought a house are frustrated when they find that roads and footpaths are unfinished. It makes it difficult if they want to sell the house. There is the mechanism of using the bond, which builders are supposed to take out at the very start. That may need to be followed more rigorously in the current climate.

I now come to the typical contribution by Mr Allister, who is the Assembly Elijah: everybody around is wrong and has some kind of devious, underhand agenda, and only he is left as the voice of purity in the Assembly. Jim and I go back a long time, but his imperious pontification — somebody gave me the word “Faustian”, which I love — and his view that only he has the interests of the public at heart and that all the rest of us have our hands grubby with compromise and everything else does not do him credit. It takes away from the arguments, such as they are, that he wants to make.

I will go through some of the stuff that he talked about. He said that the whole premise on which the Budget is based is flawed because there is no Programme for Government. He also said that, if we were a family, we would sit down and state our priorities and determine how to spend our money. You would easily know that it was a barrister who was giving the example, Mr Deputy Speaker, for even in these times of austerity, he talked about a new car, a new conservatory and a holiday. There are not too many people who are discussing that in their budgets.

I must not get angry or furious, because that annoys him as well. I will try to avoid that.

Mr Storey: Keep calm.

Mr Wilson: Yes. I have to calm down. Anyhow, this is supposed to be evidence of the dysfunctionality of the Executive. He is not the only one who has made the point, but I am sick and tired of listening to the point about there being no Programme for Government. He asked what the input from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was. My Department worked very closely with SIB officials and talked to them about what the priorities would be. There may not be a formal document from the SIB, but

the investment priorities in the Budget reflect what the SIB officials were saying. Indeed, if I remember off the top of my head, housing was the only area in which we and the SIB had a different view. Nevertheless, there has been that input. Are we really saying that, given the circumstances in which we find ourselves, whatever Programme for Government eventually goes out for consultation will have radically different priorities from the previous one?

It will not. The economy will still be at the top of it, and that will drive a lot of the decisions that are made about how we spend. Mr Allister might well say that, in that case, we should not spend money on the arts, football, sport and so on. That is a very short-sighted view. He might say that we have money to spend on developing the Maze but not enough for factories. In fact, industry will be developed at the Maze. The priorities in the Programme for Government will be basically the same as they were in the previous Programme for Government. There may well be an argument that more detail is needed, but that is for when the Programme for Government is discussed. The basic thrust of where we will spend the money will not change.

7.00 pm

The second thing that the Member mentioned was that years 3 and 4 would be even more difficult. That was the whole point of having a four-year Budget. He talked about the dysfunctionality of the Executive, but we are the only Administration in the United Kingdom, apart from the Westminster Administration, to agree a four-year Budget. Scotland and Wales were not able to agree a four-year Budget. We were able to give certainty on the Budget for the next four years and to give people the opportunity to plan and to allow them to know what difficulties lie ahead. The Scottish Administration did not do it, because they had an election this year. They gave a one-year Budget, and we went for a four-year Budget. So much for the dysfunctionality of this place. Agreeing a four-year Budget took a lot of work and longer than I would have liked, but we got down to the task of giving that certainty and spelling out the bad news in years 3 and 4 so that Departments could have the opportunity to plan ahead.

The other thing that the Member mentioned was the sacred herd of cows, the North/South bodies, at which he said we are throwing millions of pounds — while we are closing

schools, going to close hospitals and taking services away from people, North/South bodies are like some bloated being that gets fed and fed and fed. Nothing could be further from the truth. Year on year, North/South bodies are required to make savings of 3% a year, which have been achieved already. Indeed, in my discussions with the previous Finance Minister in the Republic and with the current Finance Minister there, we have agreed that, if bigger savings can be achieved, we will drive them. It is in the interests of both of us to drive them.

The Member mentioned the North/South Ministerial Council and thought, “Ha, I have got him here.” He said that its budget had increased by 50%. I was glad that he drew attention to that, because I had forgotten to make the point. It looks like a 50% increase because, last year, we reduced the budget so much that the planned spending for this year appears to be a far bigger increase. It is because efficiencies were driven for 2009-2010 that the jump seems so large. We are seeking to ensure that the efficiencies that we found last year are reflected this year, and I am sure that we will have a debate on that later.

I was astounded by Mr Allister’s comments about the secrecy of this place. He did what barristers do. They think ahead to what their question is likely to lead to. In fact, they usually think about four questions ahead. Had he thought about what he was saying about secrecy, especially about the secrecy of people’s earnings, I do not think that Mr Allister would have taken himself down that route. However, he is so keen to herd those sacred cows into the Assembly, to make his point and to try to attach non-existent motives to people, that he lost the run of himself because, of course, he has more form on secrecy and trying to hide earnings from the public purse than he can accuse the Executive of.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I thought that that might draw a response. Since I raised it, I suppose that I better let him have an intervention.

Mr Allister: If the Minister wants to make allegations, let him make them, but do not let him hide behind circuitous points. If he has something to say, let him say it. My earnings are certainly a matter of record with the taxman. I do not know whether everyone else in the House can say that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members, Mr Allister has the Floor. Please allow him to speak.

Mr Allister: If the Minister has an allegation to make, let it be an allegation that he is prepared to make outside the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: May I also ask the Minister to stick to the debate, please?

Mr Wilson: I am, because the whole point is about the secrecy that surrounds the public money spent on the earnings of individuals. If Mr Allister thinks that I was skirting around the issue and afraid to get to the point, he should know that I was only building up. I intend to get to the point. I have no difficulty in saying it outside, inside, upside, downside or on any other side of the House because the fact of the matter is that, in the election literature in North Antrim over a year ago, figures were given of legal aid earnings, and Mr Allister sought to take an injunction to stop them being published. If that is not secrecy, what is?

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not give way. Come on; you had your opportunity and accused me of kicking round the issue. There are two facts: first, money was earned from the public purse; and, secondly, an attempt was made to get an injunction to stop that information being published. That, to me, is secrecy. He has an obsession with the secrecy of others, but there appears to be plenty of willingness to have secrecy on his part. I did not want to raise that.

I want to make something clear in the House: Mr Allister may think that he can get penalty kicks in this place, but he will not get them against me or the Administration. If we have not done things right, we will take it on the nose. However, where we have done things right and where we have the duty to protect people because of data protection and so on, we will do that. We have that obligation. We cannot give out the salaries of individuals, just as he did not want people to know what he earned from the public purse. We cannot give out the religious background of individuals either. If a client came to him about such a matter, I guarantee that he would defend the right of people to privacy.

Let me move on. He also raised the issue of consultants but did not give any figures. That is an easy issue to raise because, of course, it gives rise to all kinds of questions, such as why

people employed by the Civil Service cannot do the job. As he will know, we sometimes require experts to be brought in. I am sure that he has brought in expert witnesses in many court cases.

When it comes to public procurement or other things, it is sometimes the same: there are areas of expertise in which staff are not available so we have to bring people in. However, we have reduced the spending on consultants and we have a target in this Budget to reduce it by 10% a year in future. As for his allegation, this kind of Machiavellian stuff that, "Ah you're a bunch of chancers. You take the money in one door and you put it out the other. You bring in temporary or agency staff and you don't call them consultants, but that's what you're really at". Well, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) figures show that not only has there been a reduction in consultants, there has also been a reduction in substitution staff of £5 million. Rather than substitute one for the other, we have reduced both, and we have got a commitment to reduce it even further.

He and Mrs Kelly raised the issue of moving DARD headquarters. First, when it comes to the estimated cost, no business case has been submitted. When a business case comes, it will be looked at robustly by the Department of Finance and Personnel. The previous Minister — I suspect more for election purposes rather than any real belief that it could be delivered on — indicated that she would like to see the headquarters relocated. She has £13 million allocated for that in her budget. Even a rough estimate indicates that it will cost £26 million, so there is a funding gap. There is no business case. This is far from a done deal and far from deliverable. I am sure that Members are appalled that such a piece of — well, I will not say how I would describe it — but that such actions could be undertaken. However, Mr McDevitt, who is wagging and shaking his head, should think about some of the grandiose schemes that his own Minister proposed before the election as well, knowing full well that they could not be delivered but sounded good at the time.

Mr Allister also raised the issue of Crossnacreevy, which was supposed to be indicative of the kind of failure that there is in DFP when it comes to capital budgets and so on. I first point out that, regardless of what may be said about the valuation of Crossnacreevy, it did not result in any programmes being reduced. In fact, one could argue that, given

the slippages in other projects this year, had Crossnacreevy not been there to write that slippage off against, any capital raised might have gone to the Treasury. I do not suggest for a minute, because I see Mr Allister smiling at me, that this was some cunning plan to make sure that money could be wiped up at the end of the Budget period. However, the situation that developed was rather fortuitous. Nevertheless, there must be better planning to make sure that it does not happen again, and I accept that point, which he and other Members made.

Mr Allister also raised the issue of spending by the Attorney General. I have said it publicly, so the Attorney General knows my feeling on it: as far as I am concerned, the Assembly and the Executive made a good policy decision that we could stand over and we believed we were competent to make. I, too, was disappointed that there was the legal challenge, which has now been dropped. Of course, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish courts have twice ruled on this matter. For the sake of people who are looking for some compensation, I hope that this matter will not be dragged out for an inordinate length of time.

Mr A Maginness: I empathise with what the Minister said about the challenge posed by the Attorney General and the reference to the Supreme Court. Did the Attorney General give any specific reasons for the basis of that challenge? Were those reasons endorsed by the Executive?

7.15 pm

Mr Wilson: Although I am tempted to give the Member the answer, he knows full well that it would be inappropriate for me to discuss issues that were discussed at the Executive until decisions have been made and come to the Floor of the House. He need not rise again, because I will not be drawn on the issue. All I can say is that I share the disappointment that the situation has been held back as a result of the decision that was made. However, it was going to go to court anyway because the insurance companies were likely to seek a judicial review, and we have to live with that.

Mr Allister also raised the issue of ministerial cars. Again, he wants to set up straw men, because the answer that I have given him is now on the public record. The cost of ministerial cars has been divided in two. It has been devolved to Departments because that was the

compromise that was reached. As Members know, I made proposals about reducing the number of ministerial cars. Those proposals were not accepted, and the Executive made a different decision. It has now been devolved to Departments and there are two parts to it: £6,000 car and £28,000 driver. If the Member looks at the figures that are beside the Sinn Féin Departments, he will see the answer to the question that he asked earlier.

He then finished up with the question that was raised last week: where is the £800 million for policing and justice? Show us where it is on the accounts. It is almost like Mr Bean-type accounting. I want to change the transparency of the accounts. However, we are not going to have accounts that say, "26 January, Gordon Brown, £800 million for Northern Ireland Executive after speaking to Peter Robinson". Then, somewhere further down, "£800 million divided and so much went here and so much went there". I know that he does not think that we are going to get that type of accountancy, because he is not that naive. However, he would like to present it in that way because, somehow or other, he wants to suggest that the £800 million was never given or never went to policing.

As a result of the negotiations with the Government at the time of devolution, the police budget now has money for a police college, the part-time Reserve gratuity fund and hearing loss claims. That is where the £800 million is. We now have money to deal with terrorism and the assurance of £200 million for the police budget over the next few years. The money is there in practical terms and it is benefiting policing. Whatever sacred cow, straw man or whatever he wants to set up — it is like a farmyard here, between scarecrows and sacred cows — the fact is that all he is trying to do is reinforce the prejudice that, thankfully, more and more people are now seeing through, which is that, somehow or other, nothing good can come out of the Assembly. If all of us had taken Mr Allister's attitude —

Mr Storey: We would not be here.

Mr Wilson: First of all, we would not be here, secondly, we would be having a Budget that was imposed by the Secretary of State; and, thirdly, the policing budget would be £800 million less well off. That is the price of engagement and that is the job that we have had to do.

I will finish up with Mr Lyttle and Mr Agnew. Mr Lyttle talked about the cost of division and asked what savings could be made through it. Individual Departments have to determine where savings can be made. A report has been done on the cost of division, and many of them are due to social and economic factors and are not the result of a divided society. I am not saying that we should not look for savings from the costs of divisions, but, once they are examined, we see that they are much less significant than the Member and his party seek to put forward. However, we should look for savings that can be made. I am sure that Departments will look at all those issues as they look for savings over the period.

Mr Agnew said that we should listen to the economic experts about the green new deal. I have no difficulty with that; in fact, I think that it is important. The Executive have placed great importance on helping people out of fuel poverty by conserving fuel. Although I might disagree with much of what the Green Party says, the one thing that we should not tolerate is the waste of resources that we see. As an economist, I do not believe that we should tolerate any waste of resources. People should avoid wasting resources wherever they can. Such waste could be avoided in businesses. I have seen examples of businesses that have become far more competitive by using energy and water more efficiently, for instance. We should be encouraging that. The same applies in households. That is one of the reasons why we are putting money into insulation schemes, etc. That makes good economic sense. It should not be the platform of environmentalists only; it should be the platform of all of us who want to deal with the economic issues of scarce resources.

He also mentioned public transport, as did Anna Lo. I do not know how he arrived here. One of the most efficient public transport systems is from Bangor to Belfast. It is a 20-minute journey in luxurious trains. We have spent hundreds of millions of pounds on the trains and on upgrading the track. When you get to Central Station, you walk across the road — you do not even have to walk the length of yourself — and you can get any number of buses to Stormont. Perhaps he will tell us whether he availed himself of the heavy investment that has been placed in the railway stock in Northern Ireland from Bangor to Belfast and the bus service from Belfast city centre to Stormont.

Mr Agnew: I am happy to say that I avail myself of that service quite regularly. The Minister will be pleased to know that I car shared today, so I did not bring in my own car. Unfortunately, the public transport service does not provide a bus home for me after 5.00 pm, and, as the Minister knows, we are often here much later than that. Unfortunately, I cannot always rely on public transport, and it needs that extra investment. Thank you for the opportunity to say that.

Mr Wilson: I am sure that the Member for South Belfast could recommend for him one of those wee folding bikes that he can use when the bus is not running. The Member for South Belfast is a keen biker; in fact, he pedals the whole way to work here in the mornings, and he looks fitter for it, I am sure. He is even greener than the Green Party.

Ms Ritchie: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I hope that the Member is not going to tell us that she cycles from Downpatrick, because I will not believe that. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Ritchie: I do not cycle, but I am sure that the House will want to praise and applaud the Member for South Belfast, Mr McDevitt, on excelling today in the bicycle race here at Parliament Buildings.

Mr Wilson: I suspect the competition was not all that great.

Mr A Maginness: The Deputy Speaker was in it.

Mr Wilson: That is what I mean. He is used to driving about in tractors.

I want to draw my remarks to a close. I am sure that everybody is happy to hear that. I thank Members for their patience. The Assembly's approval for the first Supply motion today and the associated departmental expenditure plans, which have been laid out in the 2011-12 Main Estimates, is a crucial stage in the public expenditure cycle. Failure to pass the 2011-12 Supply resolution at this juncture could have catastrophic consequences for public services. The second motion results from the Public Accounts Committee's consideration of the reasons for the 2009-10 excesses and its recommendation that the necessary sums be now provided by Excess Votes by the Assembly. I commend both motions to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that, as this

is the Budget Bill, the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 39; Noes 8.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Flanagan, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr O'Dowd.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr T Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle.

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

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Durkan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist:

Mr Allister.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Agnew and Mr Allister.

Total votes	47	Total Ayes	39	[83.0%]
Nationalist Votes	16	Nationalist Ayes	10	[62.5%]
Unionist Votes	26	Unionist Ayes	25	[96.2%]
Other Votes	5	Other Ayes	4	[80.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Hussey, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Swann.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] be agreed.

Committee Business

Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask that Members resume their seats, please.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides for a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards; and delegates to the Assembly Commission those functions referred to in section 19(4) of that Act in relation to the appointment of the commissioner.

On 29 March 2011, the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law. I suspect that this debate will not exactly be leading the headlines tonight. The passage of the Bill through the Assembly did not attract a great deal of attention. Therefore, in order to remind former Members and for new Members in particular, I advise the House that the Act provides for both the independent financial review panel and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards. It is the second of those items, the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, that we are dealing with today.

The role of Assembly Commissioner for Standards is an important one, which has been carried out on a non-statutory interim basis for a number of years. It is currently carried out by the Northern Ireland Ombudsman, Dr Tom Frawley. The Assembly Members Act provides that there be a statutory commissioner with a range of statutory powers. That represents a significant development in respect of ensuring that the Assembly has a powerful and independent means to have allegations of misconduct investigated thoroughly and robustly and, therefore, to satisfy any public concern.

Section 19 of the Act provides that the commissioner shall be appointed by resolution of the Assembly. Subsection 19(4) provides that the Assembly shall make arrangements; first, to ensure that any person who is to be appointed as commissioner has been identified by fair and open competition; secondly, to determine any criteria for appointments; and, finally, to determine the terms and conditions on which such an appointment, when made, is to have effect. Of course, in practice, it is the

Assembly Commission, with its statutory role to provide the Assembly with property, staff and services, that is best placed to make those arrangements. The Act, therefore, provides for the role of making those arrangements to be delegated to the Commission.

I should emphasise that, in doing so, it would remain the Assembly's responsibility to appoint the commissioner by way of a resolution of the House. The Committee on Standards and Privileges wrote to the Assembly Commission to request that the Commission table today's motion. The Commission considered the matter at its meeting on 31 May and was happy to agree to the Committee's request.

We can all agree that the appointment of a Commissioner for Standards is a good thing, not only for the Assembly but for the public and, indeed, from a political point of view, for the Assembly and politics as a whole gaining the public's trust. Supporting the motion will be the next step in allowing us to get on with the business of getting a commissioner in post.

Mr McElduff: I simply record my agreement with Mr Weir, who spoke corporately on behalf of the Commission on the matter.

Mr Cree: Similarly, I am happy with what has already been agreed.

Mrs Cochrane: I will say a little bit more, if that is OK. At the outset, I take this opportunity to thank publicly the interim commissioner, Dr Tom Frawley, for the work that he has been doing in addition to his responsibilities as Northern Ireland Ombudsman. However, it is time that those roles were separated and clearly defined.

By appointing a statutory Northern Ireland Commissioner for Standards, we will enhance the role as currently provided. In the past, the interim commissioner has had difficulty in acquiring from Members information that is relevant to his carrying out his role. That should not be allowed to continue when the appointment is made. The interim commissioner also indicated that initiating investigations would be a useful power. I agree that that is a sensible addition to the role, as it allows the commissioner to be proactive rather than just reactive.

The Commissioner for Standards also needs to be given independence from the Committee on Standards and Privileges to ensure that any

investigations are not affected by party politics. To go one step further, if the commissioner will still have to report to the Assembly Committee rather than acting on the findings of the report, I suggest that the Committee itself will also need to move away from party politics and vote on the merits of reports and complaints rather than in the interests of party affiliation.

Obviously, there will be a cost to appointing a Commissioner for Standards and his or her necessary support mechanism. The interim commissioner currently costs between £15,000 and £17,500 a year. Given the current economic climate, any cost must be kept to a minimum for the commissioner to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities. However, the cost should not limit the commissioner's ability to carry out a proactive role, as we need accountability and proper investigation where there has been misconduct. The Alliance Party supports the motion.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges): I am glad that Mrs Cochrane spoke for a little bit longer, because I have to deliver a speech on behalf of the Committee that might take somewhat longer than some of the previous Members' speeches.

On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion and thank the Assembly Commission for bringing it to the Floor. The Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 represents an important milestone for the Assembly. Not only is it the first legislation that an Assembly Committee has taken through the House, albeit with the support and assistance of the Assembly Commission, but it demonstrates how the parties here can come together to put in place measures that will strengthen public confidence in the integrity of the House.

As a result of the well-documented public concern at the expenses system and how it was abused by some at Westminster, the past few years have seen much upheaval in how politicians have been viewed by the public. That episode at Westminster understandably damaged confidence and trust in the integrity of the House of Commons. Even though there were no duck house moments or stories similar to that at the Assembly, and despite the fact that the Assembly has a much more robust expenses system, the Committee on Standards and Privileges recognised that the dismay and

hostility that was felt by the public had an impact of painting all politicians with the same brush and the potential to erode confidence in the Assembly.

The Committee on Standards and Privileges acted on that. I was a member of the Committee that conducted a review of the code of conduct and brought forward a more wide-ranging extensive code that the Assembly agreed unanimously and that applies to us all today.

7.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence I want to emphasise the importance of the code of conduct; not just the rules of the code that we all must comply with, but the principles of personal conduct the code says we should observe. Those include the seven principles of public life, which remain as relevant today as they were when they were first identified by Lord Nolan's Committee on Standards in Public Life.

I served on the Committee when it developed the proposals for the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, and we recognised that the requirements of the code would be meaningless if Members were not accountable for their conduct under it. The Committee conducted an inquiry and found that the system of accountability needed to be more robust and to be seen to be fairer and much more transparent. The Committee concluded that the role of the Commissioner for Standards should be set out on a statutory basis, with the commissioner's powers and independence clarified in that legislation. All that was agreed unanimously by the Assembly, and it is provided for in the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Mr Weir mentioned how the ombudsman, Tom Frawley, has served as Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards for the past number of years. I am unsure whether Dr Frawley realised when he originally agreed to take on the role that he would be on our books for nearly a decade, but we are very glad that he did. I paid tribute to him in the Committee meeting a fortnight ago, and I do so again today. We were pleased that he was able to carry out the role until we put our permanent arrangements in place.

It is high time that we put those arrangements in place. I now have the privilege of being the

Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and one of the first things that the Committee agreed on was that we should write to the Assembly Commission to ask it to bring forward this motion. The Committee recognises that the Commission is best placed to make the arrangements referred to in section 19(4) of the Act, and it hopes that the motion is agreed today to enable the Commission to get on with doing so. The Committee also recognises that, assuming that the motion is agreed, it will be up to the Commission to make the final decisions on what arrangements are appropriate.

I should add, however, that the Committee on Standards and Privileges previously recommended in its report that the competition to appoint the commissioner should be:

"consistent with the principles of best practice in relation to public appointments".

The Committee also indicated that that the process adopted for the appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General appeared to be "a sound and viable option", and:

"The Assembly Commissioner for Standards' specific salary and terms and conditions...should be broadly commensurate with comparable office holders."

Given that that report was agreed unanimously by the Assembly, the Committee felt that it was important to draw those points to the attention of the Commission for its consideration. The Committee on Standards and Privileges supports the motion.

Mr Weir: Given that there has only been a few contributions, most of which came from the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I will try to keep my remarks fairly brief. The first comments that we heard came from Mr McElduff, who was uncharacteristically brief. I know that he was involved in a recent charity boxing match, and I am unsure whether he took a few blows to the head and that that relates to his brevity. I am also unsure what Mr Cree's excuse was, because he similarly decided that brevity was the soul of wit on this occasion. However, all joking aside, that shows that there is a unity of spirit around the Chamber on the issue, and the endorsement that the motion received from both contributors was significant.

Mrs Cochrane correctly highlighted the need to move towards a permanent or full commissioner,

and highlighted two of the principle issues in the legislation: the additional powers that will get beyond some of the restrictions faced by the Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards and the fact that the commissioner will have clear lines of independence. She also highlighted that there must be a balance between ensuring that there are sufficient resources to ensure proper investigation by the commissioner while ensuring, in these austere times, that financial prudence is employed, so that we do not spend any more money than is necessary.

Both Mrs Cochrane and the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Mr Ross, thanked Tom Frawley for his ongoing service as interim commissioner. It is important that we, as an Assembly, reinforce our gratitude for that service, as very often carrying out the role of a commissioner in those circumstances can be a thankless task. Mr Ross also reminded us of the recommendations that the Committee on Standards and Privileges previously made on the appointment arrangements for the commissioner, and I want to thank the Committee for its hard work in helping to bring us to that point.

I have no doubt that the Commission will take into consideration all such relevant background information if the Assembly agrees that the Commission should determine what the arrangements should be.

This matter is essentially straightforward. The position of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards has been established. Arrangements need to be put in place in respect of how the Commissioner is appointed, and the Assembly Commission is best placed to do that. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides for a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards; and delegates to the Assembly Commission those functions referred to in section 19(4) of that Act in relation to the appointment of the commissioner.

Private Members' Business

Coastguard Services

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with grave concern HM Government's proposal to reduce the number of coastguard centres throughout the United Kingdom and, in particular, the threat to Bregenz House in Bangor, which if closed would leave Northern Ireland without effective coastal protection; and calls on HM Government to revise its proposals to ensure the retention of Bregenz House.

Although an hour and a half has been scheduled for the debate, I suspect and hope that it will not take as long as that.

We started today in a spirit of unanimity and consensus, with praise of Rory McIlroy. Although another motion is to come after this one, I suspect that there will be no division on it either. I hope that this debate will also reflect the spirit of unity in the House today.

For those of you who do not know a great deal about this issue, the first question is, "What is the proposal and how did we come to this point?" It is often convenient and politically expedient for many of us to blame the actions of the coalition Government across the water. However, I think that everyone will acknowledge that this is one occasion on which it is very difficult not to point the finger in their direction.

The Government have carried out a consultation on what they call "coastguard modernisation", which has a number of different facets. There is the creation of two interlinked maritime operation centres. The consultation looked at where those should be based, and the conclusion was drawn that the existing centre at Aberdeen should be one centre and that a newbuild centre should be based in the Portsmouth/Southampton area. It also identified a couple of other areas where there would be 24-hour sub-centres; Dover and London. Therefore, of the four main areas, three are in the stretch from London round to

Portsmouth. That is hardly something that will build confidence throughout the United Kingdom that all of it will be covered.

Before I move on to the other items in the consultation that most affect Northern Ireland, I will say that none of us is opposed to modernisation of the coastguard or to any methodology that means that communication or interaction between coastguard stations can be improved. Consequently, the theory — or, at least, the stated theory — behind this is not something we object to; rather we object to the practice and implementation of it.

In addition, there are to be five other substations of the national network. The locations of three of those are identified as Falmouth, Swansea and Humber. The consultation largely centres on two choices. In one case, Belfast and Liverpool are pitted against each other in some form of false competition, and, in the other, Stornoway and Shetland are pitted against each other.

As I said, none of us is opposed to modernisation. That might be the theory behind this, but, in practical terms, this is clearly an attempt by the coalition to save more money and cut costs. That is something to be regretted given that we are dealing with services as vital as coastguard services. Are these efficiencies or changes driven by reduced need for the services? No. Anyone looking at the statistics will see that the reverse is the case.

The number of people using the sea, particularly for pleasure, has increased substantially over the past years. If one looks at the figures from the so-called Belfast centre, although many of us realise that Bregenz House is in Bangor, 460 incidents were identified there in 2006, and the latest figures show that there were 654 incidents in 2010. The situation is not being dealt with on the basis of a reducing need. Those figures are almost 50% up on four years ago, so the decision is not being driven by need.

I am sorry to say that the general thrust of the proposals is clearly subject to political interference, as the Minister acknowledged. During a debate at Westminster, it was admitted that the original proposal was to ring-fence the Belfast or Bangor station, whatever you want to call it, as one of the chosen sub centres, yet it was also acknowledged that it was only because of ministerial interference that Liverpool was added as a choice. Perhaps that is because

there are more votes in Liverpool than in Bangor or Belfast. As a result, this choice is not being made on the basis of safety for the people who use the sea, it is politically motivated.

In response, there has been a clear and uniform level of opposition across all political parties in Northern Ireland. I particularly commend Lady Hermon, Jim Shannon and Margaret Ritchie, all of whom represent maritime constituencies, for their responses in Westminster.

Representatives of the coastguard came to Northern Ireland on two occasions. First, they came to this Building, where a range of Assembly Members quizzed them. They then attended a public meeting in Bangor, where all shades of political opinion were represented. There was a clear unanimity of opposition to the proposals for a number of reasons. The representatives of the coastguard were sent over here to provide information and sell a message, although I am sure that they will deny it. However, it was clear that anyone listening to those representatives did not believe in the package they had been sent to sell.

We should oppose the proposals for a number of reasons, the first of which is jobs. If Bangor is to lose out, 23 jobs will go. Although an offer of relocation to other parts of the United Kingdom has been made, many of those who work in the coastguard centre have strong family ties to the area. They may have children who attend schools there. It is simply not an option to be thrown somewhere unknown in another part of the United Kingdom. The effect of that is that those jobs will be filled elsewhere by people who do not have the same experience or knowledge, and that level of expertise will be lost.

Secondly, it shows a lack of commitment by the Government to all parts of the United Kingdom. If the proposals go through and Bangor is stripped of the coastguard centre at Bregenz House, we will be the only part of the United Kingdom without a coastguard centre. A few days ago, the Prime Minister was here expressing his commitment to all parts of the United Kingdom. If the Prime Minister wants to put his words into action, he should see this as a strong issue and reverse his position.

Obviously, the biggest single reason for our opposition is that the loss of a vital service will lead to the loss of lives. When the coastguard experts spoke to us, they told us about the golden five minutes. Those are the first five

minutes of any incident, when the transfer of information and communication could make the difference between life and death. In circumstances in which people are in an emergency situation, they panic anyway and information is not easy to convey. There could be a delay in getting in touch with a coastguard station in another part of the United Kingdom, or an accent could be misinterpreted. I am sure that many of us struggle with the wide variety of accents even in the Chamber, so goodness knows what somebody in Liverpool, Stornoway or wherever would make of some of the accents that come across the radio waves from Northern Ireland.

8.00 pm

The reality is that this penny-pinching exercise, if it is allowed to go through in its current form, will lead to a loss of lives, and not just in coastal areas. One Member, who will remain nameless, said to me that the closure would not have a great deal of effect in their area because it was not bounded by the sea. However, one of the other things that have been admitted is that the Bangor service also co-ordinates operations for the inland waterways of Northern Ireland. So, anyone in a boating accident on Lough Neagh or Lough Erne has to rely on the expertise of the coastguard centre.

There are rumours and speculation, hopefully correctly informed, that the Government, having faced the wrath of people across the UK, are beginning to retreat on this issue. If that is the case, it is to be welcomed. However, it is important that this Assembly speaks with a single voice and says to the Government that it wants to see different proposals, see them withdraw the present proposals and, for the sake of the protection of all those who use the seas and the loughs of Northern Ireland, see them withdraw the proposal to remove the coastguard co-ordination centre at Bregenz House. I urge the Assembly to unite behind and fully support the motion.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Speaking in support of the motion, I thank the Members who tabled it and secured the debate.

Coming from a coastal community — the harbour area of Newcastle — I see at first hand the tremendous work that is carried out by the coastguard service and the lifeboat. I also had

ancestors who were involved in the coastguard service many years ago.

My constituency has two very busy fishing ports at Ardglass and Kilkeel. It also contains the Warrenpoint docks, which, as you can imagine, get high usage from large vessels. They are very dependent on the coastguard services, so I am acutely aware of the need for the Bangor coastguard centre to be retained and the need for the strategic and local input on the island of Ireland to be kept.

I will touch on local knowledge for a bit of my contribution. Local knowledge is of vital importance to our rescue services. A number of coastguard members in Newcastle recently received awards for saving a number of lives off the rocks of Newcastle. That was in an area known as the Ballagh, near Bloody Bridge. As was touched upon in the previous contribution, the different townlands, the Gaelic place names and the broad and different accents are all reasons why you would not get the same service if the co-ordination base was in England. You would not get the same service that you get from Bangor.

Having been part of many searches for people who have been lost at sea, I have seen very clearly the need for local knowledge and the need for the co-ordination base at Bangor. There is a lot of confusion during search and rescue operations. There is a lot of panic from people and a lot of things to deal with, but local knowledge gives a faster response. There is a better understanding of the people and expertise. If you lose the 23 personnel, their expertise cannot be replaced.

Another major issue is the all-island co-operation that we have between Bangor and the Irish coastguard. That could also be jeopardised by the closure of the Bangor facility. There is excellent co-operation between Malin Head and Bangor. Again, you would not get that same co-operation if the service was based in Liverpool.

It was pointed out that some people do not understand the service that the coastguard provides. It is a blue-light service. In emergency situations, we want quick responses, because they are essential to save lives. Again, local knowledge is essential for pinpointing the place where a rescue has to take place. For example, there was an instance of flooding in my constituency, and the coastguard showed great co-ordination in dealing with that, as it has

done in many towns throughout the North pretty recently. If the Bangor station were closed, as was mentioned, we would be left as the only devolved Administration with no locally based co-ordination. That is not acceptable, and it is an insult to seafarers in the North of Ireland and, indeed, Ireland as a whole.

We live on an island. The population will go to sea, whether that be through fishing communities or for recreation and leisure pursuits. Many different vessels go to sea, including those from the fishing industry and leisure craft such as kayaks. The tourism product —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close, please.

Mr W Clarke: The tourism product is growing.

For all those reasons, I urge the House to support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, when Members are joining the debate, they should not proceed in front of the Member who has the Floor.

Mr Cree: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was looking to see whether someone was about to pass me, but obviously not.

I am pleased to support the retention of the Belfast coastguard station at Bregenz House in Bangor. Bregenz is Bangor's twin town in Austria. Indeed, St Colmgall travelled from Bangor to Bregenz and established a church there, so we have a direct connection to a higher level.

The Government's proposals, which Mr Weir laid out fairly well, are to shut down more than half of the UK's coastguard stations. Those proposals have serious flaws and are of concern to everyone. For two centuries, the coastguard has had a proud history of service to seafarers and the public. We all acknowledge that technology develops and makes life easier for most of us. However, there is no substitute for local knowledge, and, in cases where there is risk to life, that cannot be dismissed lightly.

Bregenz House is the only station in Northern Ireland, and it is unique in that it is the only station in the United Kingdom that has a land boundary with another European state. Its co-operation and co-ordination with the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG) is vital. Indeed, the Irish Government have nominated our coastguard to respond to emergencies off the Donegal coast.

I have to say that I am also concerned about the suggestion that, should it be retained, Bregenz would revert to providing daytime service only. That would have a dramatic effect on the service that is provided, as well as on risk to life.

Inland waterways and mountain rescue teams also depend on the coastguard. Again, some Members referred to that. For example, the chairman of the North West Mountain Rescue Team (NWMRT) said recently:

"The local knowledge and the rapport the NI coastguard have with the Republic's coastguard means that we get a very effective and efficient service and I would doubt that would happen if that local knowledge disappeared."

In Northern Ireland, unlike other parts of the UK, the only organisations that respond to such emergencies are the Police Service of Northern Ireland and HM Coastguard.

It is unfair to place Belfast and Liverpool against each other. Both have strong claims, but Belfast is unique. It has a strong interface with the Northern Ireland Executive and search and rescue partners across the island of Ireland. Northern Ireland has its own legal framework and a different approach to civil resilience to the rest of the UK.

I believe strongly that the coastguard presence is essential in Northern Ireland and enables an enhanced level of mutual understanding and co-operation under such circumstances. I am, therefore, very pleased to support the motion.

Ms Ritchie: I commend the Members for bringing forward the motion on a matter that there is unanimity on across the Floor of the House.

Given that the British Government are supposed to issue their final decision on the future of coastguard stations throughout Britain and Northern Ireland by 19 July, it is imperative that the Northern Ireland Assembly sends an unequivocal message to the Secretary of State for Transport in London that we want a full-time coastguard station in Bangor retained. We are not opposed to a more integrated service using the best technology and geographical information services and the deployment of the most robust resilience, but Northern Ireland would be the only devolved region without a local coastguard station if the one at Bangor was to be removed. Furthermore, we have a unique reciprocal arrangement with the Irish Government that enables expeditious acts of

coastal and inland search and rescue to take place throughout the island of Ireland, working in conjunction with the Irish Coast Guard. That is an important lifesaving search and rescue service that we want retained.

Representing a constituency that has a maritime coastline that stretches from Strangford Lough to Carlingford Lough, with the fishing ports of Kilkeel and Ardglass, Warrenpoint docks and other coastal locations, and an emphasis on not only fishing but recreational pursuits, I know that it is vital that this service is retained. It is important and necessary to maintain and retain a service that has developed a comprehensive knowledge of our seas, inland waterways and mountainous regions.

The consultation process has been marked by uncertainty and confusion, and such confusion in the process must give cause for concern regarding the outcome. The simple fact that the British Government are re-evaluating and rowing back on their initial proposals makes it clear that they underestimated the value of local knowledge developed over time by our vastly experienced coastguard personnel and were prepared to risk losing that vital asset.

That change of heart is necessary, and it shows that there is a twinkle of hope for us in that they see the importance of the Bangor coastguard station. I saw that for myself at the end of March when the Shipping Minister, Mr Penning, visited the Bangor coastguard station. He was presented with robust proposals by the staff there which showed that resilience could be honoured — the very point upon which they were trying to undermine the Bangor coastguard station — that geographical information services could be deployed, that we could have a more integrated service, that the reciprocal arrangements with the South of Ireland could still be honoured and that we could still have the unique arrangement of inland and coastal coastguard search and rescue services.

However, there is still confusion because I received a letter from Mr Penning just today saying that an independent review team is now being formed, with the agreement of the trade union, and that its members are reviewing the anonymised responses. It adds that when all responses to the consultation have been considered, along with the report from the Transport Select Committee, the way forward will be announced.

There is another reason why the Bangor coastguard station should be retained. There is a unique mapping system. We in Ireland, North and South, use an Ordnance Survey system from the point of origin. That is totally incompatible with the British system, which uses a different basis. Therefore, we need to be on the one page, and the one page can be provided only through the Bangor coastguard station's being retained.

All those concerns were reflected during the consultation process. Indeed, the chairman of the North West Mountain Rescue Team expressed his concern that the closure of the station would adversely affect the relationship between the coastguard station at Bangor and the Irish Coast Guard. Along with the PSNI, it is the only coast service in the North to co-ordinate rescue operations both inland and on waterways in our region.

8.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close, please.

Ms Ritchie: The courage of those who devote time to rescue efforts on our shores must not be taken for granted by the Government, and funding for that centre must be protected. Hence the need to retain the coastguard centre for our benefit and for the benefit of the communities that we all represent.

Mr Dickson: Mr Deputy Speaker, you, like me, represent the constituency of East Antrim, and, from the busy waters of Belfast Lough to Larne Lough and to the rugged coast as far as Cushendun, both of us have seen at first hand the valuable work of the coastguard and others in providing rescue along that coastal strip.

I put on record the Alliance Party's thanks to the coastguard service in Northern Ireland. It is a vital service, and, as others have said, we must do all that we can to ensure that it remains based in Northern Ireland at Bregenz House in Bangor. The Alliance Party will join all of us here in the Chamber this evening in supporting the motion.

It bears repeating that Northern Ireland has only two category-one responders to emergencies: the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Coastguard. If we were to lose the coastguard service, not only would north Down lose the service and the employment

opportunities, but the whole of Northern Ireland would lose out.

The coastguard station in Northern Ireland is unique; it is the only station in the United Kingdom with a land border with another European state. The Northern Ireland station can easily co-ordinate and co-operate with the Irish Coast Guard when necessary. One cannot be substituted for the other. Not only does the Irish Coast Guard service assist Her Majesty's Coastguard in Northern Ireland but HM Coastguard also services a great deal of the coast of County Donegal, which would not be the case if the Northern Ireland station was removed. If the station was based in Liverpool, for example, it would be difficult to see how it could also serve Donegal.

Not only does the Northern Ireland coastguard service deal with the co-ordination of search and rescue at sea, it also covers inland waterways such as Lough Erne and Lough Neagh, both of which are hugely important for leisure, boating, recreation and tourism. Without a first-class rescue service, we may damage those services. The coastguard is routinely involved in co-ordinating search and rescue operations in remote inland areas such as the Mourne.

In 2010, the coastguard in Northern Ireland responded to 654 incidents; in 2009, to 572. That highlights the need for a coastguard station in Northern Ireland. We cannot rely on other stations in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland, as that would simply put lives at risk. Personnel taking a 999 call from a distressed person at sea or in some other location must have local knowledge; that is reassuring to the person in danger. Staff not based in Northern Ireland would not have the same local knowledge to reassure and assist people in distress.

Without the coastguard, we would lose jobs and resources. We would also lose a valuable volunteer base; some 50 volunteers back up HM Coastguard in Northern Ireland. Like mountain rescue volunteers, volunteers with the coastguard often risk their lives to save someone in difficulty at sea or elsewhere at all hours of the day and night. They are often involved in difficult searches at sea, and without them the coastguard service could not operate. I genuinely believe that, because we have a locally based service, we get quality volunteers — people who are willing to support the service.

Northern Ireland has a large shipping and fishing heritage, and, whether people are fishing in Kilkeel or enjoying the recreational water sports in Portrush, it has always needed the services of a coastguard. The coastguard has produced an alternative to the Government's proposals; I hope that it will be taken into consideration in the consultation. I urge the Assembly and the Executive to do all that they can to retain that vital service in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which we will hear from Gordon Dunne, I remind the House that it is the convention that he make his maiden speech without interruption.

Mr Dunne: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to make my maiden speech this evening. First, I thank the people of North Down for electing me and giving me the great honour and privilege of serving them in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I intend to work on behalf of all the residents of North Down and face the many challenges that are ahead in my time in the Assembly.

North Down has many great assets, none more so than its spectacular coastline and Bangor marina, which attracts thousands of visitors every year. The other great asset, which was mentioned earlier today, is Rory McIlroy. As a representative of the Holywood area for many years at council level before coming here, I am, along with many other people, proud of his achievements. He was born and bred in Holywood, and we take this opportunity to congratulate him and his family on his great success in winning the US Open. As a young person of 22, he is a great ambassador for North Down and, of course, for Northern Ireland. We look forward to his homecoming; I believe that we are organising an open-topped bus, but perhaps, after tonight's debate, it should be an open-topped boat, and we will bring him up the lough from Bangor to Holywood.

It is, indeed, significant that I should make my first contribution to a debate in the House on this local issue, the retention of the coastguard and marine rescue centre at Bregenz House in Bangor, which has recently come under threat from the Government's statement of 16 December 2010 on the modernisation of the coastguard services. Much has already been said on the matter, but I appreciate that that is the nature of a lot of business in the Chamber. Bregenz House is home to Northern Ireland's only coastguard

station and, therefore, plays a crucial role in co-ordinating emergency rescue and ensuring the welfare and safety of our coastline.

I welcome the debate, which has been brought to the House by my colleagues Peter Weir and William Humphrey. I am well aware of the widespread support for the retention of our country's only full-time operational coastguard station, not only in my constituency of North Down but throughout the Province. Despite rumours that the Government are looking again at their original proposals, it is important that we exert whatever pressure we can to ensure that this vital service is maintained. I am well aware of the ongoing campaign in support of the coastguard service, and I know that a lot of good work has already been undertaken by a vast number of organisations and individuals to try to reverse the Government's controversial plans.

I recently visited Bregenz House and learned first-hand of some of the excellent work that is carried out there. Immediately, I was very impressed by the skills and professionalism of the coastguard team. One theme that is vital to the coastguard station's level of service is the importance of having local people with local knowledge working on the front line to protect our coastline. The staff at Bregenz House are among the best-qualified in the UK; of the 23 full-time staff, more than half of the coastguard team are search and rescue mission co-ordinator (SMC) qualified, leaving them well ahead of their colleagues across the water. They are in the best possible position to protect our maritime coastline.

Local knowledge of the coastline is essential when saving lives at sea and when a swift response is so often the difference between life and death. When we think of the coastguard service, we often associate it with boats and vessels. However, the responsibilities of our coastguard station in Bangor extend much further than just the local coastline. It has a key responsibility for co-ordination of emergency services on our inland waterways at Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. The coastguard's remit also extends to commercial ports, including Belfast, Londonderry, Warrenpoint and Larne.

Another vital aspect of the coastguard service is looking after the great number of recreational users of pleasure craft and other types of vessels who use the many small harbours and marinas

in Northern Ireland. In my constituency of North Down, that is a very popular sector, with many boating and yacht clubs, all of which rely heavily on the local coastguard service to ensure their safety at all times. Indeed, during my recent visit to Bregenz House, one of the vessels berthed outside the marina was a large cruise ship filled with hundreds of visitors setting foot in Bangor and, later, travelling up to Belfast.

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

Mr Dunne: They were under the watchful eye of the coastguard at all times.

In conclusion, it is vital that we unite to save the coastguard. A lot of good work has been done to date, and it is very much appreciated by the coastguard. I trust that the Assembly will unite in that effort.

Mr Swann: I shall start by congratulating the Member on making his maiden speech on this very important subject. I support the motion, and I thank the Members who tabled it. I declare an interest as a shoreline member of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and as someone who worked in the shipping industry for 17 years. Those of you who are looking at me and doing the maths will probably have worked out that I started as a cabin boy.

The value of the coastguard's work cannot and should not be underestimated, and, from a constituency point of view, the North Antrim coast is a major tourism attraction and one of the most beautiful seascapes anywhere in the world. But we should never underestimate the power and deadly natural force that lies behind that beauty. That is why it is imperative that we retain a Northern Ireland coastguard base.

Although we focus on the Province's offshore and sea fishing industry, there are also a high number of pleasure craft users here who would be happier knowing that our waterways are supported by a locally based coastguard service staffed by people who understand the local accent. An effective coastguard service is an important life-or-death factor in ensuring the future development and long-term survival of the Province's fishing and coastal tourism industries.

We should not underestimate the importance of Her Majesty's Coastguard base in Bangor, which is responsible for all maritime search

and rescue and other emergency situations, incidents and calls for assistance in its operational area. Its area of responsibility stretches from Lough Foyle to Carlingford Lough and includes the important inland waterway tourist attractions of Lough Erne and Lough Neagh. In addition, it is responsible for co-ordinating mountain search and rescue services, ranging from the Mourne to the Sperrins.

Our coastguard base provides guidance and information to all coastal and maritime users in the district, and Bregenz House acts as the UK liaison station and enjoys a close working relationship with the Irish Coast Guard, regularly making use of its air and sea assets as required. Any reduction in coastguard services will put lives in danger, due to the extra time that it will take to respond.

As my North Down colleague Mr Leslie Cree said, and as has been referred to a number of times in this House, removing the coastguard co-ordination centre from Northern Ireland would leave this devolved Administration as the only one in the UK without a centre. As I said at the public consultation meeting in Bangor, the removal of the permanent coastguard station from Northern Ireland would be a devastating blow to the morale of hundreds of volunteers throughout the rescue services. The Ulster Unionist Party has lobbied for the retention of the service, and, following today's business, I hope that it proves successful.

Mrs McKeivitt: I support the motion. More importantly, I welcome the opportunity to support my constituents, many of whom have voiced their distress at the possible loss of our only coastguard station. Recently, I met members of the Kilkeel fishing community and various maritime groups from along our coastline, and they were all alarmed that a resource as valuable as the coastguard might be removed and controlled from mainland Britain.

The coastguard is there not only to provide emergency cover for people enjoying a day at the beach, involving swimming, boating jet-skiing, etc but to offer a sense of security to maritime traffic using the Irish Sea and accessing the ports of Belfast, Derry and Warrenpoint and the many harbours and loughs along our coast.

We are all aware that the coastguard is the fourth emergency service. It has a great reputation, and, only for it, many Northern Ireland people would not be alive today. Mr Deputy Speaker,

can you imagine the outcry if other emergency services were to be cut by more than 50%; if there were to be half the Ambulance Service, half the Fire and Rescue Service and half the Police Service? Now imagine even worse: that they were to be cut completely. In effect, that is what the Government are proposing for our fourth emergency service.

8.30 pm

It should also be noted that not only is the Maritime and Coastguard Agency involved with co-ordinating emergency response but it is proactive in checking that ships meet international safety rules and preventing coastal pollution. Its mission statement, "Safer Lives, Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", should be something to which we all aspire. The removal of the coastguard service in Northern Ireland would be folly in the extreme.

If the Northern Ireland coastguard centre in Bangor closes, an essential service to fisheries, shipping and tourism will be lost, as will more than 20 professional jobs. Those local people have, over a long period, displayed great commitment and courage. I fully support the motion and sincerely hope that the Government will seriously take on board the consultation responses, which are overwhelmingly against their proposals, will reverse their thinking on the dramatic coastguard station cuts and will announce that in July.

Mr Agnew: As has already been highlighted, the coastguard station at Bregenz House is of immense importance to not just the people of Bangor, where the station is located, but the north of Ireland. I use that term advisedly because the remit of the Northern Ireland coastguard or the Belfast coastguard, as it is often called, extends beyond Northern Ireland as far as Donegal in the north and down as far as Carlingford. Indeed, Northern Ireland is the place where these two islands meet. As has been pointed out, the Bangor coastguard already co-ordinates services with the Irish coastguard, as well as having a close working relationship with the coastguard station at Clyde. It is working north, south, east and west. It is essential, therefore, that its existence continues, because that work is vital. There are legitimate fears that, were that coastguard station to be lost, that close working relationship would be lost also.

In the plans that are outlined in the consultation, there appears to be an over-reliance on switching

to IT to replace the work of those who work in the coastguard and, as has been mentioned, the volunteers. I fear that we would have a drop in volunteer numbers if we lost the professional leadership that is provided by the full-time staff at the coastguard station. Equally, the local knowledge that would be lost cannot be replaced by IT. It is a shame — I know that he is active on this issue — that former Member Jim Shannon is not here today because he might make the point that he would be very surprised if those in Liverpool, if we lost the Bangor coastguard, could understand the Ulster Scots that may be spoken when emergency calls are made.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Many of us in the House at times struggled to understand what Jim Shannon was saying, let alone somebody from Liverpool.

Mr Agnew: Absolutely. I sometimes fail to understand his point of view as well, but at least we are agreed on this issue. Indeed, we were both at the public meeting with the coastguard that was held in Bangor.

Over-reliance on IT could be a dangerous road to go down. As was mentioned by Ian Graham, who is the branch secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union, the technology that is proposed is the same technology that was rejected by the UK Fire and Rescue Service. That should concern us. We cannot replace local knowledge with Google Maps or something of that ilk.

It is important that the decision is made on an operational basis. There are fears that political rather than operational reasons resulted in the inclusion of the Bangor coastguard at a late stage. I had the opportunity of raising those concerns with the Prime Minister, and he assured me that operational decisions will be the basis for the final decision. I hope that he sticks to that. It is important to note that, as Ms Ritchie said, when the shipping Minister came to the Bangor coastguard station and heard the point of view of the staff there, he was impressed by the fact that they not only provided reasons why it should be kept but explained how the coastguard service could operate better. We have to give credit to the Bangor coastguard for that.

I thank the House for working together on this issue. Because of cross-party working, the issue has been raised at every level, from the public meeting to meetings with the Prime Minister.

That is important, and we should continue to work together on the issue.

Mr Humphrey: In proposing the motion, my colleague Peter Weir asked for consensus in the House similar to that achieved earlier in the tributes paid to Rory McIlroy. I join in the tributes to him for his part in the great achievement that Northern Ireland has enjoyed for two years in a row. Consensus broke out on every side of the House, and that is important.

Mr Weir talked about an interlinked maritime centre and referred to the fact that the centre in Aberdeen is to remain, along with those in Portsmouth, Southampton and London, which will leave the south coast of England well covered. He stressed that he was not opposed to modernisation. He said that the substations in Falmouth, Swansea and Humber will survive and that it will be a choice between Belfast and Liverpool, and, in Scotland, Stornoway and Shetland as to which will stay open.

Mr Weir's view is that the coalition is about saving money and this is a money-saving exercise. He said that use of the sea has increased by around 50% and that, given that increased usage of our maritime coast, the closure is reckless. He believes that the proposals are political interference, and he praised Lady Hermon, Jim Shannon and Margaret Ritchie for their work in lobbying Ministers in our national Parliament in Westminster. He mentioned that 23 jobs would be lost if the coastguard station were to close and that that would show a lack of commitment by the coalition to Northern Ireland. He said that a loss of service would ultimately lead to a loss of life. He also stressed the importance of people being able to understand our regional accents.

Mr Clarke talked about the two fishing ports that he represents, Ardglass and Kilkeel, and he mentioned Warrenpoint port. He also stressed the importance of people being able to understand and quickly identify regional accents, and he said that the closure would result in the service being diluted and co-ordination and response times being affected.

Mr Cree also talked about local knowledge and said that the Bangor station was the only one in Northern Ireland and that it shares a border with Republic of Ireland. He mentioned the Donegal coast and the rapport between Her Majesty's Coastguard here and the Irish Coast Guard. He reinforced the point that the coastguard is

one of the two category 1 emergency service responders in Northern Ireland.

Margaret Ritchie stressed the importance of the Government decision that is being taken on 19 July and of the House reaching a unanimous decision quickly. She also stressed the importance of co-operation between the coastguard and Irish Coast Guard colleagues. She also mentioned that she represents a maritime constituency, South Down. Ms Ritchie stressed that, in her view, the consultation process was confused. She argued that, because the Government are rowing back on their initial proposals, there is a twinkle of hope. She also mentioned the unique mapping system that applies to Northern Ireland, which is different to that used in the mainland.

Stewart Dickson of the Alliance Party said that Belfast lough, Larne lough and the Antrim coast were important to the people of Carrickfergus and east Antrim, and he thanked the coastguard service in Northern Ireland.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he join me in congratulating the Members who have remained in the Chamber at this late hour to discuss this important matter? Will he further join me in remarking on the eloquence, accuracy and standard of debate that we have enjoyed? Will the Members who tabled the motion draw the debate to the attention of the Member of Parliament for North Antrim? It is a reserved matter, and he may well have to take the cause from our hands. We may have to trust it to his care to ensure that the service is maintained.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for his intervention. The Hansard report of this debate will deal with the matter that he has raised.

Mr Dickson said that the coastguard in east Antrim had undoubtedly saved the lives of people in Northern Ireland, and he stressed that the two category 1 responders from the emergency services were the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Coastguard. He mentioned the border and the vital co-ordination role, and he believes that tourism may suffer if the station at Bregenz House is lost. He also raised the important issue that volunteering will be lost in Northern Ireland as a result. That is a key point.

Gordon Dunne made his maiden speech with the eloquence and wit that we all know him for.

I pay tribute to Gordon and welcome him to the House. His adopted home of north Down is well represented by him and his colleagues here. He also mentioned Rory McIlroy. Gordon also made a recent visit to Bregenz House and said that it is important to have local people who have local knowledge and can make quick and instant decisions. He also said that it is important that the coastguard should be available at the local ports of Londonderry, Larne, Belfast and Warrenpoint, as well as at the marinas.

Robin Swann said that he was a shoreline member of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and mentioned the inland waterways and co-ordination with the mountain rescue service. Karen McKeivitt said that there would be a huge outcry if there was a 50% cut in any emergency service, yet we are facing the potential withdrawal of the coastguard service. She also said that people are alive today who would not be had it not been for the coastguard. Steven Agnew, on behalf of the Green Party, said that Northern Ireland is a special place. He said that both islands meet here and there are important north, south, east and west relationships. He also mentioned people in Northern Ireland who speak Ulster Scots being understood by those on the mainland. Although it was a jocular remark, it is a very important point.

Members need to be aware that failure to retain the station at Bregenz House in Bangor — I mention the Belfast office deliberately, because it serves Belfast lough and the Belfast port, which is the largest port in Northern Ireland — would leave this part of the United Kingdom without a local coastguard service. As Members said, the first five minutes of any emergency call are crucial, and a local point of contact and an understanding of place names, addresses and so on is absolutely vital in ensuring that lives are saved. In that context, the retention of that service is vital.

I attended a briefing with Members before the election, and I do not think that any of us who attended that briefing in the Long Gallery left reassured by senior coastguard officials that services would be maintained if the station was withdrawn from Bangor. Members should be aware that the east and north coasts and our inland waterways are served by the Bangor station. As Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast at the time, I, too, attended the public meeting that a number of Members mentioned. It was attended by senior officials, and it was great

to see people from across Northern Ireland, including elected representatives, community representatives, people involved in the maritime industry and people involved in the maritime leisure industry. There was a very clear consensus and a message from that meeting that the service had to be retained. It was also important that representatives from the Irish Coast Guard attended the meeting and showed solidarity with our local coastguard service. Again, I pay tribute to them for ensuring, along with our own coastguard service, that the waters in Northern Ireland are very safe.

I agree with Mr Weir that lives will be lost if the station is lost to our shores. Therefore, it is important that we uphold and maintain the service. Politics should not be played with people's lives, and that is clearly what is happening. The Conservative Party is putting votes in the north-west of England or the Liberal Democrats are putting votes around the Liverpool basin at the potential expense of people's lives here in Northern Ireland. That is not acceptable, and it cannot be allowed to happen.

I am pleased that all local parties and the Secretary of State support the retention of the station. It is time that the junior Minister Mike Penning made clear the position on the retention of the service. It is gratifying that all parties in this House are united in opposing the loss of the station, which provides a vital service.

8.45 pm

I too pay tribute to my party colleague Jim Shannon, Ms Ritchie and Lady Hermon for their work. It shows the importance of MPs networking in Parliament and building up relationships. That is the importance of regular attendance and commitment to Northern Ireland at the House of Commons. In the context of this decision, such work is vital. Lobbying, whether there or in this place, is how we will secure the retention of the station.

If this decision is about efficiency, cost cutting or rationalisation, I agree that all those are vital in the economic climate that prevails in the United Kingdom. However, it is not acceptable for politicians to play with people's lives. In that context, saving money and reducing this service —

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

Mr Humphrey: — will not save lives. It will, inevitably, cost lives. I have great pleasure in supporting the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with grave concern HM Government's proposal to reduce the number of coastguard centres throughout the United Kingdom and, in particular, the threat to Bregenz House in Bangor, which if closed would leave Northern Ireland without effective coastal protection; and calls on HM Government to revise its proposals to ensure the retention of Bregenz House.

Mortgage Relief Scheme

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr F McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to implement a mortgage relief scheme to help those people who are experiencing difficulties in paying their mortgages and are at risk of losing their homes.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I welcome this morning's decision by the Minister of Finance to make money available for first-time buyers. It will give hope where none existed to many people. However, it did not go far enough for a mortgage relief scheme.

I have raised the issue of mortgage relief in Committee and in the House over the years. Many of us have dealt with people who have lost their home due to the financial mess in which we find ourselves or are being brought to court over mortgage arrears. In the first three months of this year, 822 possession orders were made to the courts, an 11% increase on this time last year. Of those, 542 repossession orders — just over 61% — were granted in the courts. Another 280 — 28.7% — were suspended by the judge in an attempt to allow mortgage holders time to repay their debts. In the last full financial year, 3,658 people had possession cases taken against them. In those cases, 1,795 possession orders were granted, and 1,041 cases were suspended to allow discussions. Assorted other judgements were also made.

Those figures hide the pain felt by many families who have worked, saved and bought a home, believing that they had probably settled into it for life, only to fall foul of the financial crisis. I read an interesting article with the heading that there were more repossessions in the North than in the South. It said that, although courts in the South had granted 136 possession orders in the first three months of this year, only 49 homes were repossessed on foot of a court order. The rest were handed back voluntarily or abandoned. There are about 600,000 households in the North, compared to 1.5 million in the South.

The Northern figures also hide the excellent work done on a shoestring budget by the Housing Rights Service in representing many of those who had their possession order suspended. It is often said that many who face possession proceedings could be helped by getting proper advice at an early stage. I have had occasion to direct constituents to free professional debt advisers, and I have seen the physical and mental relief in those people after they were properly advised. I believe that any mortgage relief scheme needs to have embedded in it proper funding for specialist advice. I also believe that the Minister of Justice has a role in providing permanent financial assistance for such groups to represent people in court, as, I believe, happens in other jurisdictions. At present, those groups provide their services free of charge. Think how much more effective they could be with the right assistance.

In the House on 28 February 2008, the former Minister for Social Development said in her speech on a new housing agenda that she was going to implement a mortgage relief scheme. That gave hope to many people. However, after a costly and confusing consultation, that came to nothing, and no scheme materialised. From then until now, over 11,000 possession orders have been issued, although not all of those led to houses being lost. Had we been able to agree a scheme, many of those people might still be in their home. It is more important than ever to implement some type of mortgage scheme. It is predicted that more people will lose their home as more jobs are lost. When we take on board the severe cuts being made to mortgage interest payments for those on benefit, those possession figures will, no doubt, increase dramatically. There is clear evidence that that is impacting on many families already. With the reduction in the amount allowed by social security for support for mortgage interest (SMI) from 6.08% to 3.63% and the possible withdrawal of SMI from many claimants in the coming months and years, things will get much worse.

In answer to a question for written answer, the former Social Development Minister, Alex Attwood, stated that between 7,000 and 8,000 people could be put at a disadvantage in the North because of the reduction in mortgage interest relief. He said that a situation in which there will be fewer jobs and less money generally would, in his view, lead to increased possessions. That paints a bleak picture. Sinn

Féin believes that the only way to ease the situation is to implement some type of relief scheme that will allow people to stay in their home.

While the Assembly was arguing about implementing a mortgage relief scheme, many different schemes were already operating in other jurisdictions. In fact, the North was the only place where one was not in operation. Not offering help or assistance will cost more in the long run. If people lose their home and end up placed on ever-increasing housing waiting lists or in hostels for the homeless, that will increase the financial and social difficulties for the Assembly in future years. We could look at the best of those schemes in operation elsewhere and develop a scheme that fits the circumstances in the North. One of those mentioned was the mortgage-to-rent scheme, which allows housing associations to intervene to ensure that people remain in their home and are not thrown on to an already bloated social housing waiting list. Co-ownership could play a role by looking at how people could be helped on to a shared equity scheme, and I think that that was what the Minister of Finance and Personnel was hinting at this morning when he announced the additional money.

The cuts to housing benefit in the private rented sector reduced the amount paid to claimants. Undoubtedly, that will lead to many more people being unable to pay the rent set by the private rented sector. Many of those people already subsidise their rent from benefits. For many of them, that is not sustainable. Many rely on handouts from family and friends to pay their rent. Many will have no option but to drift back to family homes, which, in many cases, are already overcrowded. That will be a throwback to the 1950s and 1960s, when two or three families lived under one roof.

No mortgage relief scheme should impact on the social housing newbuild programme that is already trying to deal with huge waiting lists. People on those lists have waited many years to be housed. Any scheme should run over the lifetime of the Assembly, and it could help people through the worst of the financial crisis. The loss of a home impacts on people in many ways, affecting, for example, family cohesion, health and education, and it could lead to the breakdown of the family unit. We have a responsibility to ensure that we do all that we can to assist people who are in desperate straits through the mess created by bankers

and financial institutions. The consequences of doing nothing would be far-reaching for many thousands of people.

Mr Copeland: I support the motion. It is not the first time that the issue has come before the House. It was the subject of a consultation by the Department for Social Development (DSD) as far back as 2008, it was the subject of a motion on 10 March 2009, and it is back here again this evening. That is almost 1,000 days of fearing the arrival of a letter from the postman or 12,000 or 14,000 hours of fearing the phone call that will advise you that the dream has become a nightmare and the four walls and roof that shelter you and your family, which you have paid for, looked after and invested in, suddenly may not be yours any longer. Then, watching television, you see the mortgage companies and the banks, which might in some way be responsible for sending you the letter that will render you homeless, effectively saved from repossession by taxpayers' money. As you try to sleep at night and when you listen to your children and your wife, you wonder what will become of you. You look at us in this place on television and hear us talk flippantly about £45 million here or £45 million there, you hear about clerical errors, and you wonder what the relevance of this place is or what good it can do for people who find themselves in those circumstances.

I understand the difficulties of finance, and I understand that we cannot spend money that we do not have. However, when the cost is offset against the cost of increasing social housing to provide shelter for those who lose their home, the failures in education that will arise from that and the broken hearts, broken homes and broken spirits of people who will be damaged for the rest of their life due to inactivity, is it such a large amount of money? We have a chance in this place to do something.

As you know, I have been away from this place for four years. I talked with some of my people upstairs. We seem to talk and talk and talk and to produce take-note debates, whatever that means. This matter is deserving of serious and prolonged consideration. If the Minister for Social Development makes another bid, I ask that, on this occasion, perhaps something can be done for people who, without our help, will go on to need even greater and more intensive and prolonged help.

I am in the happy position of no longer having a mortgage. I had one for 30 years, and I thought that I would never get rid of it. When it did go, I was glad to see the end of it. My daughter is at an age to get married, and she cannot get a mortgage. A home is the most important thing a person can have. It is not something on which you can easily put a price. A great responsibility resides with us here in this place. If we can do something, we ought to do it. If we can do something and choose not to do it, we will be judged harshly. I stand in favour of the motion.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I echo the comments and sentiments of the two Members who have just spoken. I back the motion, and I congratulate the proposer on bringing it to the House. It is vital that we, as a legislative Assembly, take decisions to ensure that measures are put in place to protect those who are most in need from continued and severe budget cuts, the loss of jobs and all the other impacts of the cuts.

Rather than considering the cost of introducing a mortgage relief scheme, the Executive should consider the potential cost of not introducing one. Not introducing such a scheme will create not only financial implications and increased stress on already bursting housing lists but the human costs referred to by both Members who have spoken in the debate, such as the costs of illness, unemployment, relationship breakdown and a host of associated problems. That far outweighs the cost of helping those in need.

As a developed society, we cannot stand idly by and watch people whom we could have helped face the trauma of repossession. It is, therefore, vital that we step in to provide what will be for many a vital lifeline.

I find it strange, however, that, given the number of Assembly questions on the issue and the airtime that it appears to have had in the House and in Committee, it has never been backed by the Executive, despite numerous attempts by successive Ministers for Social Development to secure funding for it. Hopefully, that will be addressed, and addressed soon. I support the motion.

9.00 pm

Mrs Cochrane: This is undoubtedly an issue that all Members will have encountered in their constituency and one that is showing little sign of improvement as our economy struggles

to move up to the next gear. Mortgage debt in Northern Ireland has increased tenfold since 2007, and the growing reality is that homeowners from all margins of our society are struggling to meet their mortgage demands. The problem may get worse still, as the Financial Services Authority (FSA) recently highlighted, for the 1.4 million borrowers who took out short-term fixed-rate mortgages when interest rates were much lower and are due to refinance in the next year. Although I understand that the issue has been debated in the House before, as we have discussed, we are still no further on in assisting those facing mortgage arrears and the potential repossession of their property.

It is disappointing to see that the bid in the June monitoring round for £3.2 million for a mortgage rescue scheme was unsuccessful. Outside of the mortgage debt advice service (MDAS), our current assistance is limited to the support for mortgage interest scheme, which, in itself, has become less effective as a result of the emergency Budget at Westminster last June. Even the homeowners mortgage support scheme, which was enacted as a direct result of the economic downturn, is limited in its effectiveness, in that it can be availed of for only up to two years.

Figures from the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service show that the rate of repossessions has been increasing steadily here for the past five years. From January to March of this year, 542 possession orders were granted. When we compare those figures with those issued by the Central Bank of Ireland, we find that the courts in the Republic of Ireland granted just 136 possession orders in the same period. Given that our neighbours in the South boast more than twice as many households, that is rightly a cause for concern. Where they are succeeding and we are seemingly falling short, is in their provision of a stable and wide-ranging mortgage interest relief scheme. Based on the amount of mortgage paid in a given tax year, it adopts broader eligibility criteria, which affords better rates to first-time buyers.

When we stop to consider the functionality of our existing support structures and the nature of those in operation elsewhere, it is clear that the needs of those most at risk in our communities are not being met. Should we allow things to continue in this way, the situation seems destined to snowball. More families would be financially crippled and, ultimately,

forced from their home, not to mention the deterrent that that is likely to be to potential first-time homeowners. In the light of that, I urge the Minister to take immediate action to tackle this growing problem. The housing crisis has proven to be more volatile here than in other parts of the UK, yet we are still being forced to adhere to a one-size-fits-all system, when clearly the system does not. Schemes such as SMI are little more than a drop in our ever-darkening ocean. What we need now is a system that is tailored to the individual needs of our society. I support the motion.

Mr Hussey: Like many Members, I could have chosen to go home earlier, but the importance of the motion forced me to stay to participate. The quotation used earlier by Mark Durkan comes from Margaret Ritchie in 2008, when she was the Minister for Social Development. What she said then is so relevant that I will repeat it:

“As a developed and wealthy society we cannot stand idly by and watch people we could have helped face the trauma of repossession.”

Those words echo as strongly today as they did in 2008. The question of whether we are a wealthy society is open to further debate. However, the question of the need for a mortgage relief scheme is current and needs urgent addressing. We cannot stand idly by and watch people whom we should be helping face the trauma not only of repossession but of homelessness and family break-up.

I once took a telephone call from a constituent as I was travelling home from a meeting in Belfast. Her landlord had entered her home illegally and dumped her, her daughter and all their worldly goods on the street. The crying of that child still echoes in my mind. I have another constituent who is burying her head in the sand and hoping that loan providers will not enforce eviction proceedings, which I know will happen in September. I worked as a financial adviser, and I know many people bought their home when they were given half a chance in the late 1990s and the early part of this century. Banks bent over backwards to hand over mortgages that were well beyond the ability of the person to pay. They offered loans of six times an applicant's salary and 120% loan-to-value ratios. I could go on, but, in the interest of time, I will not.

The current situation is horrendous for people who can no longer afford to repay their mortgage. Banks and building societies will probably allow

tenants to pay interest only on their loans but, in some cases, that too is beyond their reach. Banks and building societies have a part to play in the resolution of the problem. A notional rent should be agreed in line with Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) rents. It would be the maximum amount repayable by the tenant until he or she is in a position to resume payments on the mortgage.

Naturally, any solution to the problem rests with the ability of the tenant or the state to pay. As a state, our finances are limited, and, as I have already said, the responsibility of banks and building societies cannot be overlooked. The motion, which I fully support, calls on the Minister for Social Development to implement a mortgage relief scheme to help people who are experiencing difficulties paying their mortgage and, most importantly, are at risk of losing their home. I also call on the Minister not to let the creators of this mess off lightly, to ensure that we get value for money under such a scheme and, where possible, to make the banks accept a payment —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hussey: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: I just want to make one point to the Member. The motion would have been better framed if it had urged that the Executive endorse this route rather than the Minister for Social Development. Previous Ministers for Social Development have supported such a scheme, but the Executive have blocked it. That is where the blockage lies, and that is where criticism should be levelled.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Member for his intervention. If that is where the blame lies, I am happy to point my guns in that direction instead. However, I also call on the Minister not to let the creators of the mess off lightly, to ensure that we get value for money under such a scheme and, where possible, to make the banks accept a payment of no more than would be paid for an NIHE property. The tenant then maintains the potential to resume payments on their home when circumstances change, and the bank does not have an empty property that is gradually deteriorating due to non-occupation.

I support the motion and hope that there is a speedy resolution to the problem, which is worsening on a daily basis, and that it is soon

brought back to the House for approval, whether through the Minister or through the Executive.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. If my response fails to address any of the specific points of Members, I will, of course, write to them separately. As has been mentioned, this issue has been raised in the Chamber on previous occasions.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion, which calls on me to implement a mortgage relief scheme to help people who are experiencing difficulties paying their mortgage and are at risk of losing their home. I confirm that I support the ideals of a mortgage rescue scheme for Northern Ireland. I am happy to address some of the concerns raised today by highlighting some key actions that have already been taken and those that could be taken, if sufficient funding becomes available.

The impact of losing a home has been highlighted by several Members. Therefore, we need to recognise and deal with that in a caring and compassionate way. Members will be aware that the current economic downturn has resulted in increasing numbers of people being unable to meet their contracted mortgage payments. Resulting arrears have, in turn, led to an increase in the number of house possessions being sought by lenders. There is some evidence to suggest that actions for possession peaked during the 2009-2010 financial year, when 3,902 writs and originating summonses were issued, and 1,795 orders for repossession were granted. However, the number of actions being pursued remains high, with 856 originating summonses issued and 822 orders for possession granted between January and March 2011. That trend concerns me deeply, as it, obviously, concerns Members who are present — hence the motion.

The number of repossessions is likely to be higher in 2011 as a result of wider issues in the economy and the mortgage funding markets. The courts' Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO) indicates that it expects its caseload to continue to increase during 2011. The size of that increase is, at present, uncertain and, of course, depends on lenders and their solicitors. It is believed that significant numbers of cases have been to court and had orders for possession granted but have not yet been

lodged with the EJO. The delay between an order being granted and being enforced allows time for further negotiation to take place.

The delay may also be reflective of the current quiet situation in the housing market. If house prices begin to rise, lenders are likely to increase further the number of cases that are referred for EJO action. There is a need, therefore, to ensure that home ownership remains sustainable and that repossession cases are minimised. My Department has been able to pilot the mortgage debt advice service, which operated for around two years from May 2009. MDAS provided advice to individuals to help them to remain in their home or, in cases where that was not feasible, to assist them in exploring alternative housing options. I am pleased to tell the House that the pilot has now ended. Following a recent procurement exercise, a new contract between the Department and the Housing Rights Service has been established. That contract can run until March 2015.

Evidence from an evaluation of the pilot in Northern Ireland and the mortgage rescue scheme in England has demonstrated that mortgage default and arrears are often caused by unemployment, reduced remuneration, relationship breakdown and ill health, incidents that are normally considered to be temporary income shocks. Sharp falls in house prices, the restricted availability of credit and the protracted nature of the current downturn prevent those who face financial hurdles from accessing alternative means to resolve their difficulties. It is in such circumstances that mortgage debt advice proves invaluable. Often, work between the homeowner and lender can result in a solution being found to address those short-term problems.

Between the 2007-08 and the 2010-11 financial years, demand for financial advice on housing debt from the Housing Rights Service has grown by almost 50%. Of the 755 clients who approached the Housing Rights Service for advice under the MDAS pilot, homelessness was directly prevented for 180 clients through advocacy and court representation services.

Mr F McCann: I appreciate the information on funding for the Housing Rights Service. It provides a remarkable service in many ways. As I said, if people are assisted early enough, advice can help them more than anything else. However, one big problem is that a large number

of people take it for granted that they will lose their house and do not turn up at court. Built into any grants that are given must be some type of outreach service that allows people to buy in to that and to, perhaps, save their home in the long run.

Mr McCausland: The Member makes a valid point about how people respond to those situations. Some people try to bury their head in the sand and hope that the problem goes away. He already mentioned that. Others take it as inevitable that repossession will happen. It is important that that point is kept in mind. I welcome the Member's intervention.

Another significant fact that Members should note is that, of those who were assisted under the separate Preventing Possession Initiative, 78% had not received any previous advice about their housing debt before the day of the repossession hearing. That suggests that there remains a level of unmet need.

9.15 pm

I know that people here facing repossession are not able to receive legal aid. That is unlike other regions of the United Kingdom, where public funding is available to provide free representation to people facing repossession on the day of the court hearing. That has been the cornerstone for government in mitigating the impact of the economic recession on those at risk of losing their home. I intend to discuss the matter with the Justice Minister in the very near future.

Repossession and the threat of it is a problem across the United Kingdom. The Council of Mortgage Lenders reported that, in the United Kingdom, a total of 9,100 properties were taken into possession in the first quarter of 2011. That is 15% higher than the 7,900 in the fourth quarter of 2010 but 10% lower than the same period a year ago and equal to the average quarterly number of repossessions throughout 2010. The Bank of England's May inflation report suggests that consumer price inflation may reach 5% later this year and, despite then easing back, will still be above its 2% target throughout 2012. The net result is that we have people who will lose or have lost their home, are homeless and need to apply for social housing, which puts further strain on the waiting lists. Social housing need, measured by the common selection scheme waiting list, indicates that, in the seven years from 2004-05 to 2010-11,

there has been an increase in applicants for social housing of over 10,000, from 29,608 to 39,891. Of those, 20,967 are identified as being in housing stress and will hold positions high on the waiting list.

Mr Copeland: Thank you for giving way, Minister. I know that the hour is late, and I appreciate it.

The last time that I was here, the Minister for Social Development referred to the number of people waiting to be rehoused and then to the number of applications. There is a difference between applications and people, as an application could relate to a family of four. Do the figures that you are giving us refer to applications or people?

Mr McCausland: My understanding is that the figures refer to applications.

Provision through the social housing development programme cannot meet the identified need and demand, at least as housing need stress is currently defined. Members will be aware of recent changes arising from welfare reform. A reduction in support for housing costs will impact in two main areas: support for rents through housing benefits and, of interest to us in this debate, payment to support mortgage interest. Many people who are out of work due to redundancy or illness, for example, rely on social security benefits such as support for mortgage interest to prevent their financial situation from deteriorating, including mortgage default and arrears. Under changes to the support for mortgage interest scheme introduced in January 2009, help with mortgage interest for those on income-based jobseeker's allowance continually for two years ended in January 2011. The analysis identifies that some 562 families or individuals across Northern Ireland will be impacted by the removal of help with their mortgage interest payments in the period from January 2011 to March 2012. For those people, the most suitable option will depend on their personal circumstances.

The reduction in the rate of SMI payable — it is down from 6.08% to 3.63% — is also likely to impact on the number of people facing arrears and repossession. More mortgage accounts will lapse into arrears for the first time, and people will default on previously established repayment arrangements. I have concerns about the two-year limit on SMI for those receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance. I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

that it intends to consult on future proposals for SMI in the context of economic-related benefits in the autumn.

It is not all dire news, however. The combination of government support initiatives, the court pre-action protocol and the steps taken by lenders in exercising forbearance with borrowers who find themselves in financial difficulties with their mortgage has perhaps lessened the mushrooming and reduced the speed at which the problem has worsened. On 1 August 2009, the Lord Chief Justice's office published pre-action protocols for Northern Ireland. Those encourage greater contact between the lender and the borrower in an effort to seek agreement between the parties before seeking a repossession order. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and the Housing Rights Service have also set up advice facilities at the Royal Courts of Justice and Laganside courts for those who come to court without their own legal representation.

Throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, mortgage rescue schemes are one part of the suite of government support mechanisms for those who face difficulties with their mortgage. Although mortgage rescue should be a last resort for most homeowners, it is considered that it would help to prevent homelessness in some circumstances. It is nonetheless important to remember that a fully operational scheme would cost over £4 million each year, which would need to come out of other areas of our work.

The present assistance, which is offered by the advice service and which is operational, is open to every member of the general public, including people who have mortgage arrears and those who fear that they might not be able to meet their payments in the near future. Based on the outcomes of the pilot scheme, DSD has projected a need to provide specialist housing debt advice services to 750 people per annum. As I mentioned, that is now being provided through an extended mortgage debt advice service, in addition to the debt advice service that is normally provided by the CAB and the Housing Rights Service.

In certain cases, government should be able to help, and it is therefore important that we look at the available resources. I intend to meet representatives of the banks soon to discuss the immediate problems that are being

faced, as well as to discuss how to stop people getting in over their head in the first instance. I will also remind the banks of the value of working with advice agencies to militate against repossession. I am not proposing that help should be provided in every case, but I want to help those who are most vulnerable and have really tried to help themselves.

Finally, the launch of a full-blooded scheme is subject to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval for government funding, and we should assume that, given the publicity surrounding the launch of a scheme, there would be an increased demand for assistance. Therefore, it is estimated that the full proposed rescue scheme would cost £8.25 million over a two-year period. That amount would enable direct intervention for only 72 rescues in each of the two years of the pilot, and it includes the cost of a scheme administrator. That estimate is based on the uptake in other jurisdictions. In Scotland, £20 million was allocated in 2009-2010 and 303 rescues were completed, while Wales allocated £9.5 million and secured 135 rescues.

Since December 2010, departmental officials have worked with representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Housing Rights Service to consider the steps that may be taken to assist those who face repossession. Measures such as mortgage debt advice extension and the availability of a mortgage rescue scheme are among those supported by that group. It is envisaged that a campaign to promote the need for borrowers to engage early and openly with lenders on circumstances that may affect their ability to maintain their commitments will commence in the near future. That would communicate the key messages to allow the borrower to gain an understanding of their obligations and responsibilities and would make them aware of the options available for tackling mortgage difficulties.

In conclusion, I welcome today's motion and the debate surrounding it. However, in closing, it is important to note that the bid for the funding necessary to operate the scheme must be considered against the competing bids that are assessed by the Executive, including those for health and education. There is a finite Budget; we recognise that, and I understand the decision by the Executive not to support my bid in the June monitoring round. However, it is an

issue that we will keep very much before us over the coming months.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Question is that the motion standing on the Order Paper be agreed. Sorry, I am jumping the gun. I call Mr Mickey Brady to wind on the debate.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. If you want to carry on, that is fine.

The debate has been very productive and constructive, and there is certainly consensus that this problem is not going to go away. As someone who has been involved in the advice sector for many years, I and others have seen the problem getting increasingly bad over the years. It has now reached crisis point, and that cannot be denied. Other Members have mentioned welfare reform, and I will go into that in some detail during my contribution. Welfare reform will just make the problem worse. Unless something is done, we will be talking about this for a long time to come. A scheme was first mooted in February 2008 by the then Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie, and we have been talking about it ever since.

Fra McCann talked about making money available for first-time buyers, and the Finance Minister spoke about that earlier. Unfortunately, there are insufficient funds to provide for mortgage relief. He said that the number of possession orders had increased by 11%. The proportion granted possession was 61%, and, in 27% of cases, people were given time to pay. He cited statistics showing that, compared with the South of Ireland, the number of repossession orders in the North is disproportionate.

Fra McCann and the Minister mentioned the sterling work of the Housing Rights Service, a thread that ran through many contributions. That service cannot be praised highly enough. Without the Housing Rights Service and its work, a lot of people would now be homeless. It has given a lot of help and consolation to many people.

Another point that came through in what everyone said was the importance of good and timely advice. When I was a welfare rights worker, we tried to get that through to people. For some people who had just received an order to appear in court for a repossession hearing, it was too late. Had they negotiated with their lender at a much earlier stage, many would have been

saved from trauma, kept their house and not found themselves in that position.

The reduction in mortgage interest has been a big issue, with the rate of help reduced from 6.8% to 3.63%. That has had an impact on people. We cannot overestimate the impact of welfare reform. It has started, it will continue, and it is coming down the road at us. It will get worse and worse.

Fra McCann also talked about the increasing housing waiting lists. The lack of social housing continues to be a big problem. He talked about people having to return to the family home. In many cases, the situation is probably worse than it was pre-1969. He also mentioned that the problems of repossession, mortgage interest and inability to pay mortgages should not impact on the social housing newbuild programme, which is a lifeline for many people.

Michael Copeland supported the motion. He mentioned that the issue had been brought to the House on a number of occasions. He talked about people fearing repossession for 1,000 days. That is a genuine fear for a lot of people. He spoke of how dreams turn into nightmares. I absolutely agree with him. In my experience, the prospect of losing their home becomes a nightmare for people. He spoke about how people raise the question of the bailout of bankers. That is a valid point: bankers were bailed out.

It must be said that people were encouraged by the Thatcher Government to buy their houses as far back as the 1980s. That was Government policy. Consider that, in my constituency, the Housing Executive stock went down from 12,500 houses to just over 3,000 as people were encouraged to buy their house. They were encouraged to buy, and then the rug was pulled from under them. Unfortunately, that has continued to happen.

Michael Copeland also talked about how the Minister was considering ways of helping and how young people are unable to get mortgages. That is a reality. Some of my children have experienced that problem. He said that we have a heavy responsibility to continue to try to solve the problem as best we can.

Mark Durkan echoed the sentiments of earlier contributors. He said that it is vital that we take decisions to protect the most vulnerable and that we must consider the potential cost of not introducing a scheme. That is another valid

point: prevention is always better than cure. We should not stand idly by. The issue, having been referred to the Executive, must be addressed.

Judith Cochrane said that the issue affects all our constituencies and that mortgage debt has increased tenfold since 2007. She said that, although interest rates are now much higher, no further help has been given. She talked about the unsuccessful bid in the June monitoring round for help with mortgage relief and how the drop in help with mortgage interest affects people. She also talked about having a stable, wide-ranging mortgage relief scheme. She said that the housing crisis here is highly volatile and that we need a system tailored towards catering for our particular needs.

Ross Hussey quoted Margaret Ritchie and talked about the trauma of repossession. He said that we should help the homeless and mentioned some of the many reasons why people become homeless, such as family break-up. He gave anecdotal evidence of particular constituents and the trauma that affected adults and children. He spoke about banks handing out mortgages willy-nilly at one stage, sometimes amounting to six times someone's salary. He said that banks and building societies had a part to play.

The intervention from Alban Maginness did not surprise me. He complained about the wording of the motion. I can say without equivocation that he was defending his previous Ministers. Listening to him, I thought that the current Minister might display more tenacity in pursuing the issue of mortgage relief, rather than just talking about it, as we are still doing over three and a half years later. Perhaps tenacity is a word that should have been applied to previous Ministers.

I welcome the Minister here this evening. I am glad that he came to listen to the debate. Importantly, it shows that he is interested. The Minister said that sufficient funding was needed. He spoke about the current economic downturn and the increase in the number of repossessions sought. He said that the number of repossessions peaked in 2009-2010 but remained high. He explained that the number was high coming into 2011 because of wider economic issues affecting people who cannot afford to continue paying their mortgage.

The Minister mentioned the Enforcement of Judgments Office, where orders are granted

but not lodged. That can give people some time for negotiation. He also mentioned the mortgage debt advice scheme and how crucial that is for many people. He gave many reasons why people have mortgage problems, such as unemployment, family breakdown, the accessibility of credit and so on, and he stressed how invaluable mortgage debt advice is. Indeed, that cannot be stressed enough.

Fra McCann intervened when the Minister was speaking. He talked about an outreach service, and it must be explained to people how important it can be to get that advice. The Minister said that 78% of people received no advice before going to court. In other jurisdictions, people have free representation in court cases. I welcome the Minister's pledge to discuss that with the Justice Minister. He also spoke about homeless people needing to apply for social housing and said that there had been an increase of 10,000 in their number since 2004-05.

Mr Copeland intervened with a valid point about the difference between the number of applications and the number of people affected. Ten applications may represent 40 or 50 people, which is a point worth making.

There needs to be support for rent payments and mortgage interest. Income-based jobseeker's allowance will finish in two years, and the impact of that has kicked in already. From January 2011 until March 2012, people will be affected by that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Brady: As I stated, welfare reform is coming. Its impact will worsen, and we need to do something urgently. The point was made earlier that we should not just talk about it; we need to do something. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to implement a mortgage relief scheme to help those people who are experiencing difficulties in paying their mortgages and are at risk of losing their homes.

Adjourned at 9.34 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 21 June 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to raise the issue of a priority written question on the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. I lodged that question on Tuesday 13 June, and it was due to be answered on Thursday 16 June. I have still not received an answer to that question. It is an urgent matter, because the memorial fund, as you know, Mr Speaker, is very important to victims in our society. There are 1,700 applications awaiting payment, and money has still not been paid to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

It is regrettable that this question has not yet been answered, and I ask you to ask the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to urgently reply to this very important question.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. He now has it on the record, and I will follow the situation up for him.

Matters of the Day

Attack on the Short Strand Area

Mr Speaker: Mr Alex Maskey has sought leave to make a statement on the attack on the Short Strand area, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Maskey to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call representatives from the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. Members know that the convention is that there is no opportunity for interventions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until this matter is dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It was with great reluctance that I sought leave to raise this matter this morning, but I thought that, given the considerable media attention to it, it is important that we not only try to set the record straight, which I do not intend to take up a great amount of time in doing, but show a sign of leadership from this House to the people of the Short Strand and the surrounding area of the Newtownards Road and elsewhere in east Belfast.

I want to place it on the record that it is absolutely atrocious for any family's home in this city in this day and age to come under attack, no matter what side of the community they are from. We all know that east Belfast has been euphemistically described as an interface area over a long number of years. Communities there have suffered greatly over a long number of years. We had hoped that that was part of our history.

I want to place on record my commendation of those from the Short Strand and surrounding unionist and loyalist communities who have

worked tirelessly, especially in recent years — even more so in the past two years — and whose efforts have greatly reduced the problems at that interface location. I want to place on record my gratitude, and that of the communities in that area, to those people, for the most part from working-class communities, who have stood shoulder to shoulder, crossed the barriers and boundaries, and worked with each other to reduce the tensions in that area. They have very significantly reduced those tensions and built very strong and solid community relations, which we are all aspiring to achieve, sometimes against the odds.

It is probably fair to say that, although there is an ongoing problem for some residents in those communities, that problem has nevertheless been substantially reduced to perhaps more antisocial rioting or sectarian skirmishing, which has not been that serious in recent times. All credit is due to the people from those interface areas who have been working together and crossing boundaries to tackle that problem.

It is atrocious in this day and age that families are left to try to defend their homes. If you go to Strand Walk this morning, you will notice a number of pensioners' bungalows that have been repeatedly attacked over the years. Virtually all their windows are grilled, and those not grilled, because people had a little confidence instilled in the past couple of years, are smashed, paint-bombed and attacked. The place is like a war zone, as I think I heard someone say earlier.

My concern is that if people from any community, or any political or other sphere, try to present the problem that occurred last night as just six of one and half a dozen of the other, they are wrong. There was a UVF-related attack on the Short Strand community last night. All those with any authority or influence understand that. I am calling on everyone with influence in that area to bring it to bear, identify and tackle the problem, and bring it to an end for all the people who live in those communities.

Mr Douglas: Yesterday morning, like most in the House, I felt elated after witnessing the amazing feat of Rory McIlroy. What an ambassador for Northern Ireland, I thought. This morning, I feel sad and dejected after witnessing some of the most vicious rioting that I have seen for many years. I spoke to some residents this morning, and they said that some of the rioting was the worst it has been since 1969.

The sight of homes wrecked on both sides of the Newtownards Road and Short Strand, and people lying injured in hospital this morning, is a sad reminder of how fragile the peace is in east Belfast. We want to convey our thoughts and prayers to those lying in hospital.

I was down in the area last night after having been in the Assembly until 9.30 pm. I went to some of the homes that had been attacked in Duke Street and on the Newtownards Road. I was there this morning and, as the Member said, there were houses on Strand Walk that had been attacked. So both communities suffered.

It reminds me of the proverb, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick". When I was there last night, I felt that all our hopes to get peace embedded in local communities had, in many ways, been placed on hold. I felt sick in the heart, and I feel sick this morning.

Today is not the time for recriminations or "whataboutery". It is a very tense situation down there, and we all need to take heed of our words because the danger is that we go on various shows and inflame the situation. We must all redouble our efforts to deal with the underlying issues that fester in those communities. I can honestly say that issues have been festering there for a number of weeks, and, although there was trouble the previous night, last night was the culmination of a number of underlying issues in the area.

As an Assembly, we need to ensure that we use our mandate effectively in the House and that we are careful not to take for granted the hard work that is going on at those interfaces. I concur with the Member; great work has been done there over the years. I was involved with the first interface group there many years ago, and that became a model of good practice right across Belfast. I think that it was one of the first interface groups. However, sadly, for one reason or another, relationships have broken down. We need to start rebuilding those relationships. There is an anger, a hurt and a seething in the area this morning, in both communities, and we need to take the lead, as the Member said.

Coming from a community background, I know all too well the importance of the hard work that goes on on the ground.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Douglas: We need to support the people who are building the peace in the area.

Mr Copeland: I thank Mr Maskey and Mr Douglas for their measured remarks. I, too, was in the Chamber until after 9.30 pm yesterday, in the company of Mr Douglas, Mr McCann and a number of others, discussing the issue of mortgage relief. Real issues for real people — what this place is supposed to be about. On leaving, I was advised by a member of the PSNI that there were difficulties at the bottom of the Newtownards Road, and my phone lit up like a Christmas tree as I left the Building. I travelled there and saw scenes that I had thought, hoped and prayed I would never have to see again.

I understand that there were two distinct incidents. One happened earlier on in the evening on the Albertbridge Road, which, at the time, I did not know about. The scenes at the bottom of the Newtownards Road descended from stone throwing and communal violence to petrol bombs going both ways and to gunfire, which went both ways. There is one community with two sections down there, and it is broken, hurt and damaged this morning. There is resentment, a silent cry for help and the belief that no one cares or that no one can actually do anything to change or prevent a course of events.

It is my intention to seek a meeting with the Lord Mayor of Belfast at the earliest possible moment to see what he and I can do together. I spoke to Conall McDevitt, who was on the opposite side of a fence yesterday evening. Our one community, which shares in equal measure exclusion, economic underachievement, failures in education and infrastructural difficulties, was evidencing ancient hatreds that have no honest and real place in the place that we wish to build for all of us in here.

There are raw memories. I spoke this morning with Mary McCurrie. Forty-one years ago this weekend, her husband was killed in events that were not that dissimilar to what we saw yesterday evening. There is a salutary lesson for everyone in here. We must watch what we say and do, lest it be misinterpreted. There are no two sides to this. There is only one side, and that is the side of right. The side of right will always be mirrored by the side of wrong.

I left the scene shortly before 2.30 am, and I was back there this morning, having witnessed the strength and resilience of our people in

the form of the Belfast City Council cleansing department, which had the Newtownards Road open for traffic and the side streets cleaned. I saw families moving back into homes that are seriously damaged. I apologise that I saw only homes on the Newtownards Road because I did not have access to Strand Walk. I spoke to representatives of housing associations, who did not know where they were going to find the money to fix the broken windows, and I thought to myself, “Where will we find the money to fix the broken children?” The children who saw the streets that they play in, were brought up in and live in, and with which they identify —

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member of the time.

Mr Copeland: I appreciate your forbearance, thank you.

Mr McDevitt: Like colleagues, I arrived in the Short Strand, in St Matthew’s Court, just before 10.00 pm last night. The scene that I was confronted with is not one that any of us in the House would have ever wished to see again. A very dangerous full-scale riot was happening, and in the front line of that riot was a row of pensioners’ cottages and a chapel, which had been turned into a buffer zone between an orchestrated — I agree that it was orchestrated — and serious attempt to attack a community in the Short Strand and the retaliation from within that community. It was a reminder of everything that we have worked so hard to try to put behind us. We must accept it as a collective failure. It is not good enough to try to reduce the issues at the heart of what is still happening in some communities to being the responsibility of a few. It is the responsibility of us all.

10.45 am

In the short term, we will have to hold the PSNI to a higher standard of protection. The sad reality of the situation as it unfolded last night was not one of preparedness but of unpreparedness on the PSNI side. A situation was able to develop because of a lack of resources in the area to try to contain it. However, we cannot police this problem out. We can build out of this problem only through the good work and relationships that still exist.

If there is an upside to all this, it is that people kept talking all night. Those people have been much more involved for much longer than I have been and have a much greater local connection with both sides of that community. The House

is going to have to start reflecting on the need to build respect and tolerance in order to build true reconciliation. We are going to have to start building a better future for the several hundred young people who saw an opportunity to engage in violence last night. I hope that they never get such an opportunity again.

Again in the short term, there is a great duty on us all to behave in a way that ensures that this particular episode goes down as an exception this summer; that it is not allowed to set the tone; that it does not become the norm; and that we resolve collectively and resolutely to understand that the responsibility goes all the way to the top. We must start to put the need for reconciliation and respect at the heart of everything that we do.

Mr Lyttle: Having stood here yesterday to celebrate all that is positive about Northern Ireland, I share the sadness and dejection of my colleagues at the events of last night. I commit myself and my party to working with and supporting Members in every way to ensure that the situation is resolved. I recall working with Members as a volunteer interface worker in the area in times gone by. I hoped that the situation had been improved.

I use this platform to ask those involved in last night's senseless violence to stop. Such organised and orchestrated violence is unjustifiable and unrepresentative. It is destroying the cross-community peace building and community development work that has happened in the area. It is completely wrong that people there should be living in fear and terror at the hands of a small minority at the moment.

I ask anyone with any information to help the police so that they can respond more effectively to what is a dangerous situation. I want especially to mention the council and emergency services personnel who had to deal with an extremely volatile situation. My thoughts and those of my party go out to those who were injured last night, and I call on political representatives to take a united stand against all forms of intimidation and violence in the area.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that the deputy First Minister wishes to make a statement.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Before I make the statement, I want to say that I have been notified by my office that a complaint was made in the Assembly by Assemblyman Campbell about my inadvertently walking across a Member as he was speaking, albeit at a lower level, so I apologise for that to the Assembly.

In compliance with section 52(c)(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the twelfth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format, which was held in Dublin on Friday 10 June 2011. The Ministers who attended the meeting have approved this report, and we make it on their behalf.

Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Peter Robinson MLA, and me. In addition, the following Ministers were in attendance: Minister Attwood, Minister Farry, Minister Kennedy, Minister McCausland, Minister Ní Chuilín, Minister O'Dowd, Minister O'Neill, Minister Wilson, junior Minister Anderson and junior Minister Bell.

The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The following Irish Ministers were also in attendance: Minister Bruton, Minister Burton, Minister Coveney, Minister Deenihan, Minister Fitzgerald, Minister Hogan, Minister Howlin, Minister Noonan, Minister Quinn, Minister Rabbitte, Minister Reilly and Minister Varadkar.

The meeting provided the new Irish Government and our new Executive with the opportunity to meet for the first time and exchange views on issues of mutual interest and concern. In their opening discussion Ministers discussed common challenges, and they shared views on the economy, fiscal issues, the banks and the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). With constraints on budgets in both jurisdictions, the advantages of practical co-operation and the need to identify potential

cost savings through working together were recognised. Discussions between Finance Ministers will continue, and they will report to the next plenary meeting in November.

Ministers welcomed increasing collaboration in the field of innovation in the European Union and noted that a conference on innovation aimed at increasing collaboration in the European framework programmes will be held in Belfast on 30 June, attended by Ministers from both jurisdictions. They noted that such collaboration can lead to tangible mutual benefits. The Council welcomed the confirmation of support in both jurisdictions for the development of a satellite radiotherapy service at Altnagelvin.

Ministers noted the progress report on NSMC meetings since May 2007. They also noted the mutually beneficial co-operation of the North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland, and in other NSMC areas, including the fact that, during 2010, over 150 companies initiated InterTradelreland trade or innovation projects, of which 22 companies are first-time exporters and 12 are first-time innovators. InterTradelreland's average return on investment across its portfolio of trade and innovation programmes was on target for 2010. Through InterTradelreland's activities, in 2010, 94 new jobs were reported by companies participating in the programmes.

Waterways Ireland will host a meeting in Enniskillen from 13 to 16 September for its 17 partners from 13 countries in an INTERREG IVc project entitled Waterways Forward. Tourism Ireland's aim in 2011 is to return to growth in overseas visitors to the island from all markets, with a particular focus on the GB market, which remains the most important overseas tourist market for the island of Ireland.

Co-operation on the implementation of rural development programmes and EU programmes has been a high priority. There has been increasing success in supporting access to EU funding for cross-border and cross-community rural development projects, such as the £1.3m INTERREG IVa project between Newry and Mourne District Council, Monaghan County Council and Monaghan County Enterprise Board to develop tourism and enterprise infrastructure across the Monaghan and south Armagh region.

An all-island freight forum has been established whose work is industry-led and issue-based; it is being taken forward by working groups

focusing on competitiveness and sustainability; safe, compliant and eco-efficient road freight transport; rail freight and other alternatives; international connectivity; and data and network management. An additional stop on the Enterprise train service at Lisburn and a new Newry to Dublin early-morning direct service have been introduced. The two railway companies are planning measures that will be taken forward over the coming 18 months to align with suggestions made in the Enterprise rail seminar report.

Ministers noted that the boards of the North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland are due for renewal in December and that nominations for appointment will be brought forward for approval at the NSMC plenary meeting in November.

Ministers noted the progress on the A5 north-west gateway to Aghnacloy and the A8 Belfast to Larne projects and agreed that payment of £11 million will be made by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to the NI Consolidated Fund. The Council welcomed the continued commitment of the Irish Government to the funding of those projects and agreed to consider a further progress report at the next NSMC plenary meeting.

Ministers noted proposals relating to terms of reference one, which were prepared by the St Andrews Agreement review group arising from consultation on recommendations in a report that was prepared by expert advisers to the review group. They agreed that those will be forwarded, along with a copy of the report, for consideration by Ministers in the new Executive and in the Irish Government with responsibilities for North/South bodies, and by Finance Ministers. Taking account of those considerations, the NSMC joint secretariat will make recommendations to finalise that element of the review at the NSMC plenary meeting in November. Ministers further agreed that terms of reference two and three of the St Andrews review will also be discussed at that meeting.

Ministers noted the background and recent developments on the North/South consultative forum and agreed to finalise deliberations on this issue at the plenary meeting in November.

Ministers noted that, following a North/South parliamentary forum conference in Newcastle on 7 and 8 October 2010, the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann and the Speaker of the Assembly

asked the working groups that were established in each institution to take forward discussions on the North/South parliamentary forum. They also asked the working groups to discuss a further conference, an inaugural meeting and other ideas that were suggested at the conference and to work jointly, taking into account the valuable contribution that the conference has made to a better understanding of key issues of interest and concern to Members of our Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas. Ministers further noted the intention of the Ceann Comhairle and the Speaker to hold a joint meeting of the working groups in Dublin on 23 June.

Ministers noted that the NSMC joint secretariat has taken forward further work on cross-border mobility issues and that a bid for further funding will be made to INTERREG IVa for the Border People website. That bid, which has support in principle from the Social Security Agency, the Department of Social Protection and the NSMC joint secretariat, will include a bid for funding for a network of advisers from existing organisations to deal with complex cross-border welfare and taxation issues.

Ministers approved the appointment of Mr Ian Crozier to the post of chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency.

Ministers approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the joint secretariat, noting that the NSMC joint secretariat, in consultation with relevant Departments, will make arrangements for dates for each of those meetings. They noted that future NSMC plenary meetings will be held in the second week of June and the third week of November. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the deputy First Minister for that report. I note that there is a small section on financial difficulties, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. I am conscious of recent speculation and reports about the consolidation of financial institutions. Was there discussion about consolidating financial institutions? What impact would that have on the Northern Ireland banking fraternity and those banks that are directly affected by those that may be consolidated in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: A discussion on the economics of where we are all at ensued during the meeting. Yesterday, at the British-Irish

Council meeting, the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, made it clear that banking was undergoing huge change in the South as a result of the recent crisis that has plunged many businesses and others in the South into very deep trouble. Our discussions mostly related to how the situation in the banks would affect banking North and South of the border and also NAMA, which is a big concern for us.

We highlighted our concerns about access to lending, especially to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and about the potential impact of bank restructuring on jobs in the North.

11.00 am

We raised concerns that decisions being taken on NAMA should not damage our business interests. It was very sad that, on the day that we were there, the death of Brian Lenihan was announced. Our Finance Minister had been involved in an ongoing engagement with Brian to try to ensure that any decisions that were taken on NAMA would not detrimentally affect our situation in the North, particularly in the context of some speculation that we could end up with a fire sale, which would be very destabilising for our economic circumstances. Brian Lenihan was always willing to reassure us that he would not allow that to happen.

We highlighted the impact on trading companies that are servicing their loans when companies and loans are taken into NAMA, and we also pressed for more effective input by us into decisions on NAMA. On the disposal of assets, we said that some developers, especially those who are close to assets that are in NAMA, are keen to get them but that the decision-making process is very slow.

Our Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, also met separately the Irish Government Finance Minister, Michael Noonan, and their Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin, immediately after the plenary to discuss those issues in more depth. I understand that officials from the two Finance Departments will meet again to explore those issues further. There is obviously big change coming in the South, and I am happy that the relationship between our Finance Department and that in the South is ongoing and very strong to ensure that whatever flows from the big decisions that have already been taken, and those that will be taken in the

time ahead, does not detrimentally affect our economy.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Does he believe that North/South bodies provide value for money, and does he agree that, like Departments in Northern Ireland, they should be subject to efficiency savings?

Mr M McGuinness: I do believe that they provide value for money, and I agree with the Member that they should be subject to efficiency savings, and they are. Decisions on efficiency savings were taken at an earlier stage. The fact that we are meeting consistently at very well-attended meetings under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council suggests clearly that the Government in Dublin and our Administration in the North value that contact and the potential that exists in those bodies to ensure that we continually strive to achieve mutual benefit for the people who live on this island, whether they live in the North or in the South. The answer is very clear; we would not be meeting in this format if the institutions were not delivering for our people, North and South.

Ms Ruane: Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas. I welcome the statement and the work that has been done, particularly on cross-border mobility issues, because we know that there is a lot of work to be done there. You spoke about the inter-parliamentary forum, and I was present at the previous meeting in Newcastle in County Down, which was very useful. Can we be given further information on plans for an inter-parliamentary forum?

Mr M McGuinness: At the NSMC, we noted that, following a North/South parliamentary forum conference that was held in October 2010, the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann and the Speaker of the Assembly asked the working groups that had been established in each institution to take forward discussions on the potential for a North/South parliamentary forum, which is envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. That included discussions on a further conference and an inaugural meeting, and other ideas were suggested at the conference. There were discussions on working jointly to take into account the valuable contribution that the conference has made to a better understanding of key issues of interest and concern to Members of the Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas.

I am pleased to see that work on that is progressing well and that the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Barrett, and our Speaker, Willie Hay, plan to hold a joint meeting of the working groups in Dublin this week. That work will help to create a better understanding of the common issues facing both legislatures.

That conference, which was held in the Slieve Donard Hotel in County Down, was very well attended by elected representatives North and South, and I recall that the present Taoiseach turned up to it as leader of the Opposition. That was a very clear statement of his intent to try to take that work forward. So, it is a work in progress, and we look forward to the outcome of our Speaker's deliberations with the new Ceann Comhairle on the work plan that they put in place in October to see that we expedite the matter as quickly as possible.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I ask him to join me in welcoming the ongoing work of the north-west partnership board and ask him to work with the local MLAs and the partnership board to help them bring forward a paper on the north-west gateway initiative at an early meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr M McGuinness: Absolutely. That issue has been widely discussed and is of great interest to people living in the north-west: in Derry, parts of Tyrone and County Donegal. I do not have any difficulty whatsoever in giving our commitment that that issue will be kept at the front line in our deliberations. At each meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, that issue receives a very substantial airing, and we all recognise the great benefits that can be accrued for people on both sides of the border by pushing forward with those developments.

As we all know, attendant to all of that is the ongoing interest in the area in, for example, the building and construction of the new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin. There is also interest in the fact that the preferred routes for the A5 and the A8 have been outlined and that contractors have been appointed for three different stages of the A5. Infrastructure is vital for the north-west gateway, and I note from papers in the region that some concern has been expressed about whether or not the A5 project will go ahead. People need to be reminded that the A5 project is a very high-level agreement, as is the construction of

the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital. They involve high-level agreements between our Executive and the Irish Government, and substantial funds have been put into those projects. Most recently, £11 million was allocated following a joint decision a few days ago.

Anybody who is in any doubt about whether or not the A5 will go ahead needs to dispel those doubts. Obviously, we cannot pre-empt the outcome of the ongoing inquiry in the Omagh area, which will be completed over the next couple of weeks. We will see what that throws up for all of us. However, those two projects are very important to the north-west gateway. There are many other important projects of an educational nature and, indeed, if we see good cross-border co-operation, other projects can bring huge benefits to the people of that region.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and welcome his identification of the savings and collaboration possibilities through effective operation of the North/South bodies. Enhanced engagement with Europe to the benefit of local small and medium-sized enterprises is of particular interest to the OFMDFM Committee. I note that there will be a conference on innovation and collaboration through the European framework programmes on 30 June. How, exactly, will our small and medium-sized enterprises be involved in that conference? What additional outcomes does the deputy First Minister hope to see from it?

Mr M McGuinness: I trust and hope that they will all be ably represented at the conference. The First Minister and I went to Brussels to meet the Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, and that was a big subject during our conversations. There was an acceptance from us that we had more to do and that the gap between where Europe is at and where our SMEs are at in relation to “joined-upness” left an awful lot to be desired.

When we came back from that meeting, we made it absolutely clear to all our Departments that it was important that all of us upped our game in Europe. It was also quite clear that, in Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, we were dealing with a sympathetic commissioner. As someone who understood the problems of small and medium-sized enterprises, she was more than willing to facilitate smoothing the way to accessing funds from her department. Therefore, the conference

is going to be important, and we encourage all those invited to turn up.

Its emphasis and focus are on SMEs and improving access to Europe. I hope that people will take what is a golden opportunity to increase our performance and, as a result, gain more support from Europe for our region.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. He mentioned the A5 and A8 projects. Will he give further details of the discussions about those projects at that meeting?

Mr M McGuinness: The good progress on the A5 and A8 projects was noted at the plenary sitting, and the Irish Government reaffirmed their commitment to those projects and the related funding. As I said, we agreed that the payment of £11 million would be made by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to the NI Consolidated Fund in accordance with agreed procedures. The Council noted that development work was continuing on the A5 project and that a public inquiry commenced on 9 May 2011. That inquiry was expected to last some eight weeks and is due to complete shortly.

Similar progress has been made on the A8, with the third key milestone met, on target, by the publication of the draft Orders and environmental statement in January 2011. A public inquiry into that project is expected to commence later this month.

Those road projects, along with the progress already made in the overall motorway network in Ireland, will ensure greater road connectivity across the island. It is no secret to any Member that people west of the Bann have always felt neglected by Dublin and Belfast. In Donegal's case, that feeling relates to Dublin. People in parts of County Tyrone and County Derry have always felt that the good roads were in the east, not just in the North but in the South. In the west of Ireland — our focus is on the north-west at the moment — there is an infrastructure deficit. The region is of the strong view that the deficit of proper infrastructure works against the prospects of bringing new investment to the area.

Therefore, the A5 and A8 are critically important projects, and I understand that there are concerns about them. The ongoing inquiry is an opportunity for people to air those concerns and we will see what the judgement is at the end of that. However, these are high-level agreements

between our Administration and the Government in Dublin. They are road projects that will bring huge benefits to our people.

All the talk has been about the A5, but the A8 Belfast to Larne road is also a vital road to upgrade for the simple reason that, along the eastern seaboard of the island of Ireland, we have large juggernaut vehicles travelling back and forward to Europe. It is important that we provide a proper road infrastructure to ensure that those vehicles get to their destinations with road safety in mind as well as the speed with which they ferry their products to mainland Europe.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Does he agree that the consistent commitment from the Dublin Government contradicts, in some way, the lack of a total commitment from the Assembly to upgrade the A5? Does he think that it is time for the Assembly to indicate clearly that it wants to build that road?

Mr M McGuinness: The commitment from the authorities in Dublin has been strong. As far as I am concerned, the commitment from the Assembly and our Executive is also strong.

We attended the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, at which we took very important decisions. We took a joint decision to allocate £11 million. That is not done if the project is not to go ahead. What would be the sense in that? It would make no sense whatsoever. The question is around the fact that there has been a public inquiry and that objections to the road have been raised. People have a right to have their say, and they are having that opportunity through the establishment of the public inquiry, which will consider its deliberations and make public its findings. We will then take it forward from there.

11.15 am

However, I have not heard anybody on the Executive say that the A5 project should not go ahead. In fact, the contrary is the case. It will come down to how it goes ahead and the quality of the road. Obviously, there is a strong view that a project of that size needs to be of very high quality. The question is how we can do that and, at the same time, save vital funds for our Administrations, North and South. There is no question about the road. However, questions

remain about the outcome of the inquiry, about whatever discussions officials will have in the aftermath of the inquiry and about how they take forward the project. The project is very far advanced. Contractors have been informed that they have the tenders for three stages of the road. I think that the project is unstoppable. It is now a matter of how it is taken forward to try to minimise the costs to our Administrations, North and South.

Mr G Robinson: Will the deputy First Minister undertake to ensure that value for money will be achieved when planning sectoral meetings and that, where possible, money will be saved by using government venues for meetings, as well as modern communication methods?

Mr M McGuinness: We are always very conscious of the need to ensure that costs be kept to a minimum, and we are satisfied that costs have been kept to a minimum. As many Members know, the NSMC building in Armagh was opened recently, and that has allowed us to plan ahead to minimise costs. The cost to OFMDFM of NSMC meetings that the Executive host is met by the joint secretariat in the North. Travel and subsistence costs for staff other than those from the NSMC and the joint secretariat are met by the responsible Departments. The approximate cost to date, for example, of the 81 NSMC meetings held since May 2007 is around £99,000. The approximate cost to OFMDFM of the 15 NSMC meetings held in the new NSMC joint secretariat building in Armagh since April 2010 is around £5,000, and the cost to OFMDFM of the 20 NSMC meetings held in 2010-11 was £7,000. People will accept that we are spending money on NSMC meetings very prudently.

Mrs Overend: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I am sure that he will be aware of the EU directive on agency workers, and the associated discussion and debate by the unions; namely, the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICITU). Have any discussions taken place on the directive?

Mr M McGuinness: There were no discussions at the meeting. I have no doubt that, if it is an issue of major concern to any party in the Assembly, and if we are informed of the detail of the difficulties that exist, there will be no objection to our speaking to corresponding Ministers about how we are handling the issue,

North and South. I know that there is a debate out there on the matter.

Mr A Maskey: Although the deputy First Minister has addressed the issue of the St Andrews Agreement review, is it possible for him to elaborate on it?

Mr M McGuinness: We discussed the next steps on the St Andrews Agreement review at the plenary meeting. Work on the review has included consultation with Ministers on the former Executive and the former Irish Government on recommendations from a panel of experts on the first element of the review, which is the efficiency and value for money of the existing North/South bodies. Taking account of the responses received, the review group made a number of proposals. Those, along with a copy of the report prepared by experts, will be forwarded to Ministers in the new Executive and those in the new Irish Government responsible for North/South bodies and, of course, the Finance Ministers.

Taking account of any comments received, the NSMC joint secretariat will prepare recommendations for us to consider, so that we can finalise that element of the review at the next plenary sitting in November. At the November meeting, we will also discuss the other two terms of reference of the review, which include the case for additional bodies and the areas of co-operation within the NSMC.

It is important that our new Administration takes some time to consider the work done so far, including the proposals from the review group on the first element of the review. We also need time to consider the other elements, and, in my view, it is important that all elements of the review are progressed at the next plenary sitting. At the NSMC meeting, we agreed that that should be the case.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Reference was made to the wider community facing difficulties in the banking sector. Was a decision taken to have joint North/South ministerial discussions with the banking sector to rectify its inability and unwillingness to provide credit facilities to the business, commerce and construction industries? Does the deputy First Minister agree that the lack of availability of credit facilities is having an adverse effect on the local economy, North and South? Will he ensure that every

effort is made to bring other North/South bodies into the review of the whole process?

Mr M McGuinness: I gave a detailed explanation of how we are taking forward the review of the North/South bodies in my previous answer. It is a work in progress. I agree with the Member about the difficulties being presented to businesses, north and south of the border, as a result of the failure of the banks to lend in a way that would sustain the opportunities to face the mighty challenges that all businesses face as a result of the economic downturn.

The Member also asked about joint representation. Earlier, I made it clear that officials from our Finance Department and the Finance Department in the South have pledged to meet regularly. No doubt, that will, as it should, form part of their discussion.

One important feature of the NSMC meeting was the openness with which the Taoiseach approached it. At the beginning of the meeting, he made it clear to all of his Ministers that they should exchange mobile numbers with our Ministers, and vice versa. I welcomed his positive suggestion, as it allows all sorts of opportunities for Ministers of various Departments to meet their counterparts. At the very least, his suggestion enables them to keep in touch so that they can deal with some of the huge challenges that we face in a way that does not compromise the work of the North/South Ministerial Council. We will get huge benefit from having close contact with our corresponding Ministers in the South.

The issue of credit for SMEs and businesses is as difficult in the South as it is in the North. If anything can be gained by applying further pressure to the banks through a joined-up approach, I have no doubt that officials from the two Finance Departments will consider that suggestion when they meet.

Mr T Clarke: Were there any discussions on child protection at that or any prior meeting of the NSMC? If so, what child protection plans have been taken forward in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: That specific issue did not come up at this meeting, but it has come up at previous meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. I know that our new Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Edwin Poots, is concerned about the issue.

He will work closely with the new Minister for Health in the South, Dr Reilly, to ensure that we deal with the issue in a way that gives the greatest possible protection to all our children. As I said, the issue did not come up at this meeting, but that does not mean to say that it is not regarded as a huge priority, because it is. That will be given further emphasis by the work in which Edwin Poots and Dr Reilly will engage in the time ahead.

Mr B McCrea: The deputy First Minister has already dealt with the matter of the banks on a number of occasions. However, I wonder if I could just press him further. Given that the economy is at the very centre of our thinking these days and the unavailability of credit is hampering us, does he anticipate any consolidation of the banking sector in the Republic of Ireland? Was that discussed with his colleagues at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, and, if so, what are the implications for Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: The economic situation was discussed, and the plenary meeting provided us with an opportunity to meet and exchange views with the Taoiseach and Irish Government Ministers. Our common economic and budgetary challenges were a key topic of discussion. The Taoiseach outlined the steps being taken by his Government to bring the economy back on track, which includes the ongoing work on the restructuring of the banks. He said that they are heading in the right direction, and we outlined the challenges that we face and the efforts that we are making to address those, including some encouraging signs and plans to find further potential sources of additional revenue.

It will be no surprise to anybody that the issue of corporation tax came up during our discussions. I was encouraged that, during the press conference that the First Minister and I held with the Taoiseach after the meeting, the Taoiseach was supportive. When he was asked whether the Irish Government would support the work in which we have been involved to try to get a lower rate of corporation tax, without hesitation, he said that he would.

We know that huge changes are taking place in banking. We also know, because of the linkages between the banks in the South and in the North, that that will have implications for us. Our focus has to be on ensuring that jobs are protected and that whatever emerges from the

restructuring will move us all forward in a much stronger way with a more stable approach to banking than the one that previously brought us to the misery with which many Governments throughout the world are now dealing.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister mentioned the advantages of practical co-operation in the NSMC meeting. Is he aware that 40,000 people who were born in the Irish Republic are living in Northern Ireland, many of whom have lived in Northern Ireland for many years? They are, therefore, UK residents, UK voters and UK taxpayers, but they do not have a right to a British passport. He is a UK resident, UK voter and UK taxpayer, and he has a right to an Irish passport. The Home Office, the Irish Republic's Government and the Northern Ireland Office are aware of the issue. Will the deputy First Minister ensure that, at a future NSMC meeting, or perhaps more relevantly, at a British-Irish Council (BIC) meeting, the matter is brought to the attention of the Home Office and a suitable accommodation arrived at to give those people the same right to a British passport that he has to an Irish one?

Mr M McGuinness: That issue has not come up, and, being very honest, I have to say that I am not that familiar with the subject. However, I understand the Member's point. Before we deal with it through the auspices of the NSMC, it might be a good idea for the Member and me to get together to discuss it. We will see then how we can take the matter forward.

Mr Dallat: I am pleased that we do not need passports between the North and the South.

I welcome the deputy First Minister's statement, particularly what he said about improvements to the Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin. I have every belief that the entire delegation travelled by train.

In relation to rail freight, the deputy First Minister will be aware that virtually everything in the North, and between North and South, moves by road. With the establishment of the new all-island freight forum, can we have an assurance that freight trains in the North will begin moving again and that Northern Ireland Railways will be part of a campaign to move goods from roads to railways? It is shameful that it was discontinued years ago.

11.30 am

Mr M McGuinness: The joint secretaries' progress report included an update on the establishment of the freight forum in January 2010. The work of the forum is industry-led and issue-based and has been taken forward by working groups focusing on competitiveness and sustainability; safe, compliant and eco-efficient road freight transport; rail freight and other alternatives; international connectivity; and data and network management. Each priority area has a lead organisation and an overseeing Department. The lead organisations are the Freight Transport Association, the Department of the Environment, the Road Safety Authority, the Irish Exporters Association, the Irish Maritime Development Office, the central statistics and research branch of the Department for Regional Development (DRD), and the Central Statistics Office. A key aspect of the freight forum is co-operation between Government and the logistics sector to help the forum to take a strategic perspective and be relevant to the needs of industry.

I am very sympathetic to the points that the Member made, and the establishment of the freight forum provides an opportunity to deal with those very relevant issues. Finding solutions to those issues will bring huge benefits for us all.

Mr Beggs: In the statement the First Minister and the deputy First Minister acknowledged that there were constraints in the Budget in both jurisdictions and that there is a need to identify potential cost savings. Does the deputy First Minister accept that all North/South projects should be reassessed to ensure that they are proportionate and justifiable and that such investment will maximise the use of our limited funds so that the economy will reach the best possible outcome?

Mr M McGuinness: That was one of the purposes of the review. The budget for the North/South bodies and Tourism Ireland for 2010 was £146 million; the Executive's contribution was £37.6 million and the Irish Government's £108.4 million. Guidance to inform the preparation of corporate plans for 2011-13 and 2011 business plans for the North/South bodies was issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the Department of Finance to sponsor Departments in July 2010.

The guidance specified that further minimum cash-releasing efficiency savings of 3% in 2011,

culminating in 9% over the period 2012-13, are required. It includes the proviso that there may be a review of those efficiency guidelines for 2012-13 to take account of the developing budget process in both jurisdictions. Therefore, we agreed that the North/South bodies, like all other public bodies, must ensure efficiency. However, it will be important that they have sufficient resources to deliver on their mandates.

Considerable work has been done on the preparation of budgets and business plans for 2011 and corporate plans for 2011-13 for the bodies. It is anticipated that those corporate and business plans will be approved by Ministers at NSMC meetings to be held between now and September.

Executive Committee Business

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law today.

Ministerial Statement

Intergovernmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Co-operation

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Justice that he wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement regarding a meeting that I had with Alan Shatter TD, the Minister for Justice and Equality, under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on co-operation on criminal justice matters, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 8 June. It was the third formal ministerial meeting under the IGA since the devolution of justice matters on 12 April 2010 and the first since the recent Assembly and Dáil elections, although I have met Mr Shatter on a number of occasions since his appointment.

The intergovernmental agreement is an agreement between the UK and Irish Governments and provides a framework for co-operation on criminal justice matters. It supports at least one meeting each year between the Justice Ministers in the North and the South, as well as a working group of officials from both jurisdictions that meets at least twice a year. The working group is supported by ad hoc project advisory groups, of which there are currently six. The advisory groups are tasked with considering criminal justice-related work strands of mutual interest. We inherited those arrangements. Of course, it is open to the Executive and the Assembly to review them.

As I have said in previous statements to the House, I am committed to keeping the Assembly informed of meetings that are held under the auspices of the agreement, on the same lines as North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings. The meeting with Alan Shatter on 8 June was constructive and provided a good opportunity to discuss a number of criminal justice issues of mutual interest. We were updated on a range of cross-border issues, including supporting public protection; management of sex offenders; support for victims of crime; youth justice; forensic science; and promoting social diversity. We also discussed the progress of the ad hoc project advisory groups that cover those areas of mutual benefit and noted, in particular, the effective channels of communication between criminal justice organisations on both

sides of the border to ensure that the border is not exploited by criminals to escape justice.

Indeed, Members may be aware of media reports last week concerning the management and supervision of sex offenders in Northern Ireland, which are rightly acknowledged as being highly effective. Through the excellent working relationships and sharing of information between the two police services, and under the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI), we already see instances in which the PSNI routinely invites its colleagues from an Garda Síochána to attend local area public protection panel (LAPPP) meetings in border areas. That degree of cross-border operational co-operation between the police and probation agencies on the ground should be supported and encouraged.

In addition, the meeting provided an opportunity to review the good progress that has been made against a work programme that I agreed in July 2010 with the then Irish Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Dermot Ahern. Flowing directly from that work programme, I am particularly pleased to report that Alan Shatter and I signed a memorandum of understanding between our forensic science services. The memorandum of understanding has been developed to provide for mutual support in the event of sudden loss or damage to facilities. It is an example of the excellent co-operation at an operational level among criminal justice organisations on the island of Ireland.

That practical co-operation will benefit both jurisdictions and further strengthen working relationships that are already in place between the two forensic services. I am pleased to report to Members that the heads of the forensic science services in the North and the South meet regularly with their Scottish counterpart and also have in place heads of agreement to provide mutual support, which is similar to the memorandum of understanding that I signed with Alan Shatter.

Other successes over the past 12 months include agreement on a joint proposal to evaluate the use of the stable and acute risk assessment tool for sex offenders, as well as the organisation of a joint seminar for the two probation services to showcase the extent of co-operation in public protection. I welcomed the opportunity to join Dermot Ahern in making a few closing remarks at that seminar.

At our recent meeting, Alan Shatter and I agreed a new work programme, setting out priorities for cross-border co-operation over the next 12 months. I have attached a copy of the work programme to my statement for Members' information. Planned actions to promote co-operation are captured under three areas: enhancing justice delivery; support for victims and witnesses of crime; and management of offenders. Some specific planned actions include exploring the use of fast-track and formatted probation reports in courts to speed up justice; considering the scope for a joint approach to implementing the proposed new EU directive on victims of crime; and exploring the potential of extending information-sharing to include related areas of public protection police work, such as child abuse, domestic abuse and missing persons.

Progress against all the actions in the 2011-12 work programme will be monitored by the working group of officials, who will report to Alan Shatter and me at our next ministerial meeting. It is my intention, Mr Speaker, with your continued agreement, to update the Assembly following that meeting. We are seeing that the devolution of justice powers provides real opportunities to enhance working relationships further between and across the criminal justice agencies. Operationally, criminal justice agencies in the North and the South are working closely together. I want to maximise that co-operation.

The IGA is an important framework for supporting co-operation among the various agencies. As we are all too well aware, crime does not stop at the border. I know that, by continuing to work together, we can help to make this island, North and South, a safer and a better place to live.

The meeting also provided an opportunity for me to update Mr Shatter on two key initiatives in my Department — the development of a reducing offending strategy and the youth justice review — while I received an update from him on the development of Ireland's White Paper on crime.

Finally, the intergovernmental agreement is not intended to provide for discussion of cross-border security issues. However, I have cause to discuss such matters regularly with Mr Shatter, and I used the opportunity of our being together to briefly discuss some general wider cross-border security-related issues.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for his statement to the House today. He touched on the management of sex offenders. First, I seek an assurance from the Minister that information under the notification requirements in both jurisdictions is, indeed, passed on to the relevant authority should there be any movement of offenders and that appropriate management of those offenders takes place.

Secondly, do disqualification orders for those sentenced for child sex offences apply equally in both jurisdictions? What is the Minister's view of the 278 cases where a disqualification order was not put in place in this jurisdiction even though there was a presumption that that would happen? Does he share my serious concern about that matter? What efforts are being made by the judiciary to urgently review all of those cases and to ensure that no risk is posed to the public?

Mr Ford: I thank the Committee Chairman for his couple of related questions. I have every confidence that the arrangements for the management of sex offenders North and South, which is particularly facilitated by the specialist group under the IGA, ensure that all appropriate information is passed between agencies, regardless of the border. The reality, of course, is that both jurisdictions have legislation in place that requires sex offenders to notify the police or the Garda Síochána of their details if they move across the border, so the primary onus is on the offender. However, it is clear that there is high-level co-operation between the agencies.

Mr Givan also asked about disqualification orders. I should make it clear that the issue of the 278 orders that he mentioned is one for the judiciary to follow up on at this stage and to address why there has not been a statement on why orders were not made in those cases. The examination of that arose because of action I took in the wake of the McDermott case last autumn. I am glad that the judiciary is now following through on those issues. I hope to be able to report to the Committee on the detailed position in a couple of days' time. The precise detail of how a disqualification order is applied on a cross-border basis will be part of the report that I give to the Committee.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. In terms of the work programme,

what discussion did the Minister have with the Justice Minister in the South about the management of offenders, given that there have been some very damning reports about prison conditions, particularly where vulnerable people are concerned? Did he have some discussion with the Minister about how the Departments could work together more to ensure that there are fewer lock-ups; more education facilities; better access to health facilities for prisoners, particularly vulnerable ones; and improved prison conditions?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms McCann for her question, although I fear that it is outside the precise scope of the IGA meeting. The management of the two prison services is not regularly covered in the operation of the IGA. However, she made a number of points that will clearly come through as we work on the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme and when we see the final report on prisons from the Owers review team. She made some entirely valid points about the need to ensure that there are the highest possible standards of management in the Prison Service.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note a number of comments that he made about effective communication channels to make sure that criminals do not escape justice and the excellent co-operation on forensic science at an operational level on the island of Ireland. If there is to be enhanced co-operation, why must it be only at an operational level? Should we not be able to share information on DNA, fingerprinting and all the other good things that the forensic science services look at on a cross-border basis? Is there any reason why that information cannot also be shared with other police jurisdictions in Great Britain?

11.45 am

Mr Ford: I fear that Ms McCann is not the only person who is trying to drag me significantly away from the precise detail of the IGA. The reality is that questions of co-operation between jurisdictions on the sharing of information are beyond the scope of co-operation on criminal justice matters as currently dealt with through the IGA. There are perfectly reasonable questions to be asked about the level of co-operation, which, in some cases, can extend to European matters, as well as cross-jurisdictional issues in the UK and cross-border issues on this island.

I support the fullest possible sharing of information to deal with organised crime. That is why we see the positive work that is being done by organisations such as the Organised Crime Task Force and the strong co-operation between a number of different agencies, for example, between the two revenue and customs organisations and between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána. Those are examples of excellent co-operation, but no doubt there will always be occasions on which Members will suggest that we could further improve that co-operation.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the Minister's statement and the meeting that took place between him and Mr Shatter, the Justice Minister in the South. I also commend the work programme that was agreed between the two Ministers and the two jurisdictions, although it could be further enhanced. On 23 March 2011, the previous Committee for Justice met representatives of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), who indicated that there could be further co-operation in the collection of evidence, the interviewing of witnesses, etc, by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. I ask the Minister and his southern counterpart to consider seriously the initiation of a study that would see further co-operation and allow agencies on either side of the border to deal with issues such as fuel and money laundering. That would have good and practical implications, North and South, in dealing with organised crime.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for his welcome for the statement and his support for the work that is being done under the IGA. The picture that I am getting at the moment from a variety of organisations, including the Organised Crime Task Force, in which SOCA fully participates, is that the highest possible level of co-operation is ongoing between the revenue and customs organisations in the North and the South. I am determined to have the highest level of co-operation.

If Mr Maginness is suggesting that investigations should be carried out on a cross-border basis, there would be issues as to how that might happen that would be of concern to people outside the Department of Justice. However, it is not something that I or any of my officials are opposed to. The issue is how to ensure that we get the best possible practical co-operation and the means for it without disrupting good working

relationships, if some were concerned about the precise methods that were used.

Mr Dickson: I also welcome the Minister's statement and his continued practice of keeping the Assembly up to date with the work that he does with his colleagues in the Republic. I also welcome the memorandum of understanding between the forensic science services, on which perhaps the Minister will give the House a little more detail. I particularly welcome that, as Forensic Science Northern Ireland is based in my constituency of East Antrim. Will the Minister tell the House whether he has any other plans for similar arrangements with the other forensic science services in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Ford: I thank my colleague for his welcome for the continuing arrangements. As I said at the outset, the IGA, although it is something that I inherited from direct rule Ministers, is directly analogous to the NSMC. At some stage, the Assembly may decide that the IGA should be replaced by a justice strand of the NSMC, but, until that day, I will ensure that the Assembly is kept informed in the best possible way, through statements to the House and interaction with the Committee for Justice.

My colleague asked specifically about the forensic science memorandum of understanding and about co-operation elsewhere in the UK. We have the heads of agreement, which were signed by the heads of the agencies, including the head of the Scottish agency. However, because of changes to the governance arrangements in England and Wales and significant movement towards privatisation of forensic science services there, it has been much easier to co-operate with those agencies that are still part of the state set-up in Scotland and Ireland. If I see that there are benefits to be had from wider co-operation, I am open to that, but at the moment, we have made significant advances through the co-operation between the three jurisdictions where the state agencies are able to manage that level of co-operation through good working arrangements and memorandums of understanding.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I refer him to the strengthening arrangements that are being put in place for the management and monitoring of sex offenders. I welcome strengthened relationships that ensure that

there is better monitoring of them on a cross-border basis.

Although it is useful to see that there are those good relationships between North and South, and in the full sharing of information between Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom, has the Minister either sought assurances or can he give the House any confidence that the same strong levels of linkage are there between the Republic of Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom to ensure that, in this chain of monitoring of sex offenders, there is no weak link?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Weir for his question. However, it now appears that I am responsible for the justice system in the Republic and the other two UK jurisdictions as well as in Northern Ireland. My empire knows no bounds.

The simple answer is that I can give no direct assurances as to arrangements for co-operation between jurisdictions for which I have no responsibility. However, I have no reason to believe that the co-operation is any less than would be the case where it involves us. There have been occasions recently when sex offenders have moved from England to the Republic and fairly speedy action has been taken on both sides of the Irish Sea to deal with that particular problem. The issues are in hand, but outwith my responsibilities.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin.

I welcome the Minister's statement and his outline of the meeting with his colleague in Dublin. I am particularly interested in the section where he says that a part of the remit was dealing with public protection and:

"the effective channels of communication between criminal justice organisations on both sides of the border to ensure that the border is not exploited by criminals to escape justice."

With that in mind, has the Minister done any exploratory work on loopholes, particularly with regard to head shops and legal highs? Substances banned in Derry may be bought by nipping across to Letterkenny, and vice versa. Has the Minister plans to try to close such loopholes?

Last week at the Committee, the Minister's officials spoke of trying to enforce the law in the

North on ticket touting. It was pointed out that all you have to do is go to Donegal, where it is not illegal to sell tickets at above face value. Has any exploratory work been done on those issues?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for his question. There is clearly a range of issues with regard to which the border can be somewhat permeable. Nonetheless, the specific issue that you make most of about head shops and so on is one on which significant efforts were made in the South last year to deal with, for example, the production of new illicit substances that are chemically marginally different from others. My understanding is that the matter is being followed up at a UK level. It is not something for which we have legislative responsibility. However, I will ensure that I get the detail as to exactly what progress is being made in London either to the Committee or to Mr McCartney.

Mr S Anderson: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that criminal justice co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic must be mutual, meaningful and genuine? Does he also therefore agree that the Smithwick tribunal must be given the time and resources necessary to complete its important task? Did he raise that issue at his meeting with Mr Shatter?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Anderson for his question. The Smithwick tribunal did not feature specifically on the formal agenda, but I raised the issue privately with Mr Shatter before the meeting began officially. He assured me that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure that the Smithwick tribunal will do its work within a reasonable timescale and that, if necessary, the timescale will be extended, as that had caused a certain amount of concern on this side of the border. He has received an assurance from Mr Justice Smithwick that he is capable of doing the work within the required timescale and will seek additional time if necessary. The PSNI and the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) have also given significant assistance to the Smithwick tribunal, so I believe that we are doing all that we can in this jurisdiction.

Mr Hussey: I also thank the Justice Minister for his statement. He will be aware of the recent report on the Kingsmills massacre. He referred to cross-border operational co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland

and an Garda Síochána. Extradition procedures between North and South remain difficult due to Irish concerns over the British judicial process. To what extent does that mutual support extend to historical cases?

Mr Ford: Mr Hussey's question is entirely legitimate, but it is outside the responsibilities that I assumed on 12 April 2010. I am unaware of any difficulties regarding any extradition cases in either direction across the border, but if there are concerns, I will happily listen to what any Member has to say and see what the position is. The difficult issues as to how we deal with many incidents that happened in the past are beyond the current scope of the IGA, but I believe that the Assembly needs to start to take them seriously.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that questions should relate to the statement.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the developments on information sharing. Does he agree that there should be no hiding place for child abusers or people engaged in domestic violence on the island of Ireland?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Eastwood. He is absolutely right. There should be no hiding place for people engaged in any sort of criminal activity anywhere on the island. We need to ensure maximum possible co-operation among all relevant agencies. I am determined that crimes such as domestic violence and child abuse, which would not always have been regarded as the highest priorities for cross-border co-operation, come within the ambit of the current arrangements.

Mr McDevitt: I draw the Minister's attention to the original 2002 intergovernmental agreement between the then NIO and the Department of Justice in the Republic. I note that that agreement remains largely unimplemented, and there are gaps, specifically the absence of arrangements for lateral entry between the two police services and a real conflict over pension rights for PSNI officers and garda officers seeking to transfer to the other service. Will the Minister update the House on any progress on that issue? Does he intend to prioritise it in the months ahead as an area that must be implemented, particularly now that we have lost 50:50 direct recruitment to the PSNI?

Mr Ford: Mr McDevitt is being as creative as other Members have managed to be this

morning. The issue of lateral entry to the Police Service or to the Garda Síochána is a significant concern, but practical work is ongoing with the recruitment of 40 specialist officers by the Police Service.

The key problem with lateral entry is, as the Member correctly highlighted, the issue of pensions. That is an issue for every state institution in the United Kingdom relating to every state institution in the Republic of Ireland. It is not an issue for only the PSNI and an Garda Síochána; it is an issue that goes way beyond that, and it is beyond the ability of the Department of Justice to resolve. I wish the issue to be resolved, but other minds have supposedly been tackling it for many years, and we do not see easy movement for people in any part of the public sector, North/South or east-west. I do not think that we will be able to resolve the issue within the Department or the IGA, although I wish that it could be resolved so that we could maximise the opportunity for officers to move, North or South.

12.00 noon

Mr Dallat: I want to ask the Minister about the targets set for meetings between him and his counterpart in the Republic and their officials. I remind him that those targets are for one meeting a year between the Ministers and two meetings a year between officials. Given the millions of pounds that are earned by all kinds of criminals, does the Minister believe that those are serious targets? Would he forgive me for thinking that there must be more meetings between North and South Korea?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Dallat for the question, although the term "target" is not entirely accurate. What he stated is, as I understand the IGA, the minimum requirement. I have ensured that we have got to the point where we have a formal ministerial meeting at least twice a year, the various project advisory groups are meeting frequently and officials are meeting somewhat more frequently than the twice a year specified in the agreement. That is an indication that the Department of Justice is taking the IGA seriously and implementing it.

To the best of my knowledge, I was the only Minister from the Executive who had a meeting with his counterpart from the South in the time between the Dáil election and the Assembly election. Admittedly, that was an informal meeting; nonetheless, it was a face-to-face

meeting between the two Justice Ministers. It was essential to ensure that we got off to a good start in our relationship with the new Justice Minister in Dublin. I had a good working relationship with Dermot Ahern, and I have already established a good working relationship with Alan Shatter. I assure Mr Dallat that if the agreement says one meeting a year, that is not the number that I am looking at.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the nine clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by the five schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 5 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Committee Business

Agency Workers Directive

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the EU directive on conditions for temporary agency workers (directive 2008/104/EC); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure, in implementing the directive, that both the needs of workers and minimising the costs to business are taken into account.

I am pleased to bring this motion to the House to debate these important policy proposals and draft regulations, which will transpose the EU agency workers directive into Northern Ireland legislation.

This is an issue that is too important and significant to allow it to go through the Assembly merely by negative resolution in September without having a wider and fuller debate that allows Members to understand the Minister's position. The change does not merely represent an increase in certain costs by inflation: it is a major change to working and employment practices that will affect many people in Northern Ireland. That is why the Committee has agreed on the motion.

The agency workers directive ensures the protection of temporary agency workers by applying the principle of equal treatment. The directive provides that the basic working and employment conditions of temporary agency workers should be, for the duration of their assignment with a hirer, at least those that would apply had they been recruited directly by that hirer to occupy the same job.

The conditions to which the directive will apply include duration of working time, overtime, breaks, rest periods, night work, holidays, public holidays and pay. The directive must be in operation before 5 December 2011, which puts something of a pressure on us to conclude our business. The Department went out to

consultation on the policy proposals and draft regulations in December 2010, with a closing date of 11 March 2011.

On 1 June, the Committee was briefed by departmental officials on the 18 responses to the consultation that were received. The officials explained that a key issue in the directive was the default position that equal treatment rights should apply from day one of an assignment. However, article 5 of the directive provides for a qualifying period for equal treatment, on the basis of an agreement between the social partners at a national level.

In the United Kingdom, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) entered into discussions with the UK Government and agreed to a 12-week derogation before the temporary agency workers' entitlement to equal treatment would apply. However, here in Northern Ireland, since the Trades Union Congress does not represent Northern Ireland trade unions, the Department entered into discussions with the CBI and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Unfortunately, they were not able to reach agreement. The Department took legal advice and concluded that the agreement made between the social partners at national level does indeed extend to Northern Ireland and that the Department would not be fulfilling its responsibilities in the transposition if it made an agreement at only regional level.

As a result of the directive, agency workers may benefit from enhanced conditions, while private and public sector hirers may face increased costs. Therefore, it is absolutely appropriate that the Assembly should be able to deliberate on what will be a significant issue for many people.

Departmental officials told the Committee that, if the directive was implemented from day one, it would result in estimated costs of £716 million, with benefits of £550 million over a 10-year period, resulting in net costs of £166 million over that same period. However, based on the 12-week qualifying period, the estimated costs would be reduced to £300 million and the benefits to £220 million over the 10-year period, resulting in net costs of £80 million over the same period. Private sector employers face an annual increased cost of some £27 million, while public sector employers face annual increased costs of around £6.5 million. The

main annual benefits run at £19.2 million for private sector employers and £6.4 million for public sector employers.

Under both options, agency workers and Her Majesty's Treasury would benefit financially, while private and public sector hirers would face increased costs. It was assumed that the employment businesses — that is, the temporary work agencies — would be able to pass on 85% to 100% of the higher wage and holiday costs to hirers.

Departmental officials explained that a number of issues were still being reviewed. Those include the definition of an agency worker, working time and holiday entitlement, the definition of pay, length of breaks between assignments, permanent contracts of employment, payment between assignments, and antenatal and maternity leave. I am sure that other members of the Committee will speak at some length on those issues.

At its meeting of 8 June, the Committee agreed to arrange for further briefings to gain an understanding of the viewpoints of unions and employers. On 15 June, the Committee was briefed by representatives from trade unions, the CBI, Diamond Recruitment Group, the Law Centre Northern Ireland and departmental officials. I will leave it for other members to raise the issues. We are grateful, given the shortage of time, that those who attended the consultations were able to get us additional information quickly.

In the time left available to me, I would like to speak — not as the Committee Chair, but just as an MLA — about why it is important that this is debated in the Assembly. We often hear the refrain from the business community that all that happens is that we introduce more bureaucracy and more red tape and that, when we get directives coming from Europe, they are somehow magicked out of the air, arrive with a cost burden and have nothing to do with us here. That is something that we really have to confront.

When we were having the debate in the Committee, I noticed that, when reasonable arguments were put forward, on whatever side, members of the Committee listened carefully and actually agreed with many of the points that were raised. There was not a knee-jerk reaction but a considered response. It is important that we give Members of the Assembly the opportunity to debate those

important issues in full Chamber, because that way we are able to inform and consult with the electorate.

One of the things that struck a chord with me is that there are issues to do with maternity leave. Whether employed by rogue traders or not, there are occasions when people who announce that they are pregnant suddenly find that, due to the economic downturn, there are no jobs available for them. That does not seem to be the correct way to go forward. We introduced laws to protect women who are pregnant for very good reasons, and we should not step away from them idly. Of course, there is other protection available under the law, and perhaps the implementation of the directive by the Minister will allow us to clarify exactly what is understood by the law, but it is a situation that many people think we have to deal with, even if it is only in a minority of cases.

I also have to say that I found it basically unfair that you could have employees who are agency workers doing the same job for many years — including, I am told, in the Assembly — perhaps for up to 15 years, yet they do not have the same rights as people whom they are working alongside. That just does not seem right to me.

Having said all that, I am also aware of the issues raised by employers about the need for flexibility and the need to ensure that our costs are maintained and that we provide a really good working environment for everybody, because you must have some form of job. The real challenge is to make sure that we get balance in those matters. I am also aware of the issue raised by the ICTU. There were some difficulties with getting some information forward, and I am grateful to the trade unions that supplied some notes to us. I have no doubt that other Members will bring up the issues, but it was apparent when we were talking about those matters that there was a complete lack of information on the total number of people that we were talking about. Of course, that makes setting policy difficult.

I want to conclude by thanking my long-suffering Committee Clerk — I am sorry if I have slipped back into being the Chair — my Committee and the officials for doing an awful lot of work very quickly. It is an important job that they have done. I am looking forward to hearing what people have to say. In my opinion, this is about real issues that have a real impact on the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: There will be real costs. This is real politics, and I look forward to the debate.

Mr Ross: I listened this morning to the media saying that we will be deciding on this issue. I do not think that that is entirely right. It is a European directive; therefore, we do not have a choice about whether we implement it. Our choice is on how we implement it. I understand the need for the directive. I have spoken to many people who have been working for an employer as agency staff for many years, and I have also heard some fairly horrific stories of agency workers being exploited by unscrupulous employers.

However, today it is not our business to be debating the European directive — its details and what it includes — as such. We have to recognise that the directive will be applied to all regions of the United Kingdom, so the debate that we have to focus on this afternoon is whether Northern Ireland is included in the national agreement that was arrived at between the TUC and the CBI in Great Britain in relation to the 12-week qualifying period. The Committee Chairperson has already said that, and I am sure that other Members will mention the need to strike a balance in this debate between workers' rights and the cost burdens that are placed on businesses.

12.15 pm

I argue that the fact that the unions and the CBI have managed to strike that balance and come to an agreement on the 12-week qualifying period should be welcomed. The directive should be implemented in Northern Ireland in the same way in which it is to be implemented in the rest of the United Kingdom. The unions, of course, argue that the TUC does not represent workers in Northern Ireland, has no remit here and was not part of the negotiating process. It is regrettable that the TUC was not part of the negotiating process and was not included in those discussions. Nonetheless, the fraternal relationship between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the TUC may be something that they can work on by themselves.

The position that has been adopted by the trade unions in Northern Ireland is that we should implement the directive from day one rather than allow for the 12-week qualifying period, and therefore have different implementation

in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK. In principle, I am not opposed to Northern Ireland going a different way to the rest of the UK on certain issues. We already have regional variations, and that is what devolution is all about. After all, we vary on a range of issues, including having different licensing arrangements and different abortion laws.

For me, the debate comes down to two major issues. First, can we implement the directive differently from that which has been agreed at a national level? Secondly, would it be desirable for us to implement it differently from the rest of the United Kingdom? There is some disagreement on the first issue. The unions in Northern Ireland believe that we can allow for regional variations throughout the UK. However, my reading of the situation is that, as is stated in article 5 of the directive, the UK, as the member state of the European Union, can derogate from the directive if agreement can be met at a national level with social partners. That has been accomplished at a national level between the CBI and the TUC. As I said before, it is regrettable that trade unions from Northern Ireland were not involved in those negotiations, but perhaps that is an issue that they have to deal with. I ask the Minister for Employment and Learning, in his closing comments, to spell out the legal advice that he has received about whether the national agreement between the CBI and the unions applies to Northern Ireland. I believe that it does, and that we can opt into it.

The second issue is about whether it would be desirable to implement the directive differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. As I said, I am not opposed to regional variations, because that is what devolution is all about. In this case, however, it is clear that a regional variation would place businesses in Northern Ireland at a disadvantage compared with businesses in GB.

In the previous mandate, the Executive placed the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government. I am quite sure that, when the Programme for Government for this mandate comes forward, the economy will still be at the centre of all that we do. In recent weeks, I have been involved in a series of meetings with business and other leaders about getting the powers to reduce the rate of corporation tax. It is all about helping to attract foreign direct investment; helping businesses to expand; helping us to create a more vibrant and larger private sector; and helping us to create jobs.

Indeed, all the main parties in Northern Ireland have bought into that. I ask them why we would want to implement the directive in a way that would place local businesses at a disadvantage and create further costs for them.

The CBI has expressed its concerns about the increased administrative burden. Indeed, any Member who speaks to businesses in their constituencies will hear about the increased cost and administrative burdens that arise from regulations, most of which originate from Europe. The CBI has given us the figures that outline the cost of the directive. Earlier on, the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning spelled out the difference in costs between day one implementation and the 12-week qualifying period.

Mr Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Ross: The Assembly should be focusing on helping to create an environment in which businesses can create jobs, not on gold-plating legislation that could ultimately cost jobs —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Ross: — especially when the unions and business leaders have already come to an agreement at a national level.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As an Assembly, we can seize this opportunity to take the lead on the equality agenda. That is precisely what the agency workers directive invites us to do. The directive establishes a general principle of equal treatment in working and employment conditions of agency workers and permanent members of staff in similar posts. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) public consultation on the directive invited the public to express their views on the policy proposals and the draft regulations that will implement the directive in the North. This is our opportunity, as an Assembly, to influence the outcome of the transposition of the directive by December 2011, as I understand it.

The directive, as outlined by the Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, Basil McCrea, does indeed have a broad scope. I draw attention to a quote that the Law Centre brought to the attention of the Committee for Employment and Learning. In the *James v Greenwich Council 2007* appeal ruling, the

president of the Employment Appeal Tribunal, Mr Justice Elias, stated:

"We should not leave this case without repeating the observations made by many courts in the past that many agency workers are highly vulnerable and need to be protected from the abuse of economic power by the end users. The common law can only tinker with the problem on the margins."

The Law Centre went on to speak to us about its experience, which was similar to that of the unions that came before us. Both used the same phrase. They said that every time an agency worker presents for advice on employment rights, their hearts sink. The Law Centre's experience reflects the view expressed by Mr Justice Elias:

"most agency workers are low-skilled and may accept work through an agency as a necessity because of want of an alternative. They are not looking to deprive themselves of employment rights."

It went on to say that, essentially, agency workers are:

"the second-class citizens of the employment sphere."

Furthermore, it said that agency workers do not deliberately exclude themselves:

"from the statutory protections that they would otherwise enjoy."

Some believe that the 12-week qualifying period in the North should be reduced significantly, to six weeks. Others argue for the removal of any such qualifying period. In the Committee, some members called it gold-plating. Indeed, Jim Allister was worried that it might form a patchwork of rights. Others referred to taking the lead on equality.

Sinn Féin has consistently championed the cause of agency workers on the basis of equal pay for equal work. In 2008, Mitchel McLaughlin tabled a motion calling on the then Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey, who, at the time, responded very progressively, to:

"take the necessary measures to protect agency workers, and to ensure that such workers are provided with the same statutory protections, regarding pay and conditions of employment, as the directly employed workforce." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 26, p245, col 2].

The motion was passed unanimously. At the time, Sinn Féin highlighted the loss of over

900 jobs at Seagate in Limavady, a significant number of which were the jobs of agency workers who were not entitled to redundancy pay. Elsewhere on the island, Sinn Féin tabled a joint motion with the Labour Party in the Dáil, and it submitted similar motions to county councils.

As the Chairman and Mr Ross said, in recent weeks, the Committee for Employment and Learning took some evidence — just some, given the limited time available. There is an evidence gap and an information gap. We are not sure exactly how many agency workers there are in the North. Some people say that there are 22,000. We took evidence from the unions, business and the Law Centre, and written evidence from ethnic minority groups.

I would suggest that what is called the agreement between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in Britain and the unions does not apply here, because at no stage was ICTU involved in those discussions. Therefore, in respect of the North, the social partner agreement is invalid, because ICTU did not have a proper role in it.

This is a unique opportunity for us to lead in the area of rights. The directive is a priority issue for Sinn Féin, and we should extend its provisions.

Mr P Ramsey: First, I thank all those who made a contribution to the Committee, both in person and through correspondence, over the past number of weeks. Those contributions have given all members a wider view of the issues that will arise as a result of implementing the directive, and I am grateful for the time put in by departmental officials.

In speaking to the motion, I stress that it is our duty in the House and in Committee to ensure that the provisions over which we have jurisdiction are implemented with a balance in mind of protecting workers and minimising the cost to the wider business community.

I will touch on a number of issues that arise as a result of the consultation. As Barry McElduff said, they go to the very heart of what the equality directive seeks to secure. I have written to the Minister for Employment and Learning to ask him to investigate the possibility of establishing a regional social partner agreement. I have some concerns, and I accept the point that was raised by the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU about not being part of the formal consultation process. The national version of the agreement agreed the 12-week qualifying

period on behalf of the social partners, but there has to be scope, Minister, for regional disparities in the workforce, just as there are regional disparities among parts of Britain. We need a regional agreement to help to address issues that will come forward in future directives as well.

Central to many of the concerns of workers and their representatives was the 12-week qualifying period in which to ensure that equality is clearly in the workplace. That raised a number of concerns, primarily the provision that 12 weeks is valid in the consideration of each so-called assignment, rather than each hirer. That would give irresponsible hirers the opportunity to effectively opt out of giving workers equality of treatment by simply giving them assignments of a length that means that they do not qualify. The qualifying period should be included when calculating holiday entitlements for relevant workers.

We need to know exactly how the anti-avoidance mechanisms will be put in place. We received responses to the consultation from stakeholders who were concerned about how the £5,000 fine may be applied and the general scope of any punishments for offending hirers.

I agree, as have other Members, with the Law Centre's contention that any terms and conditions of workers should include rates of pay. The Department's employment agency inspects relevant agencies to ensure that they comply with general terms and conditions, but we should look for a more robust inspection programme from the employment agency to ensure that any potential offenders are stopped. Furthermore, the rest period guarantee should be valid from day one. If we truly want the spirit of the directive to work on the ground, equality has to be the number one principle. I see no real reason why businesses would not want to implement that.

I will talk briefly about the provision for pregnant women in the directive. That is clearly a fundamental issue. It seems only common sense for women who find that they are pregnant to inform their primary point of contact, which is usually the agency, which should then ensure that hirers are informed correctly of the situation. It should not be the responsibility of the worker to ensure that information is disseminated correctly. I do not see how that could be detrimental to business. It does not

require extra administration, and it will give a lot of peace of mind not only to the worker but to the small business concerned, as it would know that it has performed its duty responsibly.

I share the view of the many respondents to the consultation on the conditions of employment when a pregnant worker is moved to more suitable employment. Again, in the interests of transparency and equality, I see no reasons why her entitlements should not transfer with her to the new role, and, in particular, why her working conditions or pay should change. That goes back to trying to address the equality that is outlined clearly in the spirit of the measure. That is something that we should endeavour to implement on the ground from stage one.

My time is running out. Clearly, the directive comes from Europe, but I appeal to the Minister for some discretion to allow input from the local unions in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Alliance Party on what is an issue of flexibility to the local economy and equality for our workers. I, too, welcome the engagement that the Committee for Employment and Learning has had with local business and workers on the issue and the public examination that this European policy, which will impact the everyday lives of people in Northern Ireland, is receiving.

12.30 pm

There seems to be a degree of agreement on many of the directive's provisions and on the view that they will be a positive enhancement of the rights of agency workers in Northern Ireland. However, the key issues appear to be the extent of the provisions, the fairness of the 12-week qualifying period and whether the UK Government's social partnership agreement with the TUC and CBI is applicable to Northern Ireland, given the disputed authority of the TUC in Northern Ireland vis-à-vis the ICTU. There is also the issue of the time pressure to transpose the directive before we incur costly infraction fines from Europe.

It is welcome that, as a result of the directive, the basic working and employment conditions of temporary agency workers will be the same as permanent employees for the duration of their assignment. It is also to be welcomed that the regulations will provide the same entitlement to rest time and leave as for the permanent

employee in lieu of entitlement for untaken holidays. I also understand that the directive will make particular provision for the protection of pregnant women and new mothers in the areas of health and safety at work, antenatal attendance and rights to alternative work if necessary, but I share the concern of some of my colleagues about how far the directive goes on maternity rights. I am open to hearing more on that.

There is a cost in the transposition of the directive to local employers, and that cost increases significantly in the absence of a qualifying period. The Minister must consider carefully how his decision in that respect will balance workers' rights and economic recovery in Northern Ireland.

I join my Assembly colleagues in thanking the ICTU, the Law Society, the CBI and everyone who submitted consultations to the Committee for Employment and Learning. I recognise that there is some disagreement around the fairness of the 12-week qualifying period for entitlement to those new provisions and about whom such an agreement should be struck with. I understand that the Department received clear legal advice that the agreement with the TUC and CBI permits that provision in Northern Ireland, but a wider debate appears to be required on the standing of ICTU in social partnership agreements in the region.

There are also wider concerns about the use of agency workers in general, and the Committee has clearly taken those matters on board. In particular, the issue of employees spending multiple years in temporary and agency arrangements has caused significant concern, as has the disproportionate number of women and ethnic minorities who find themselves in temporary employment. The general percentage of the UK workforce in temporary employment seems to be greater than in most other developed economies, particularly Germany and France. The Assembly may need to return to those issues, and I ask that the Minister consider all the issues that have been raised in the debate when applying the agency workers directive in Northern Ireland in as fair and timely a manner as possible.

Mr D McIlveen: I find myself in complete agreement with my party colleague Mr Ross. We have to accept that, although the debate is useful for airing the Committee's views on the

issue, we are powerless to do anything about the legislation. Whether we like it or not, the legislation will come into effect on 1 October 2011, unless further powers are given to the Assembly.

Mr McElduff: I ask the Member to rethink his comment that we are powerless in the matter, given that employment law is devolved to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. I remind him that it is a European directive, so “powerless” is perhaps not too strong a word to use.

All Members will be united in wanting the rights of all workers to be protected, and I believe that it is the ethical responsibility of this House to do so. However, my concern about the legislation is twofold, and perhaps, if nothing else, we can impress on the Minister the need to at least make his feelings known to his counterpart in Westminster on behalf of the Committee. First, does the legislation send a consistent message to the business community? I believe that it does not. On one hand, the majority of Members believe that advancing the role of our private sector will be key in driving forward our economy, but, on the other hand, this legislation will lay yet more cost and bureaucracy on our private sector.

The Committee had a presentation from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, and its representatives very flippantly described private business as crying wolf on the additional costs. I met representatives of a business from my constituency yesterday, and they showed me in black and white how, this year, they have already sustained a bill of £600,000 as a result of what was gauged to be a very small rise in the minimum wage. The same company's most modest projections show that the cost of implementing the new legislation will be in the region of £300,000 this year. That bill of nearly £1 million has been forced on a private company as a result of what is seen as relatively straightforward legislation. That sends out a very inconsistent message on how we feel the role of our private sector should change in coming days.

My second concern is that the timing of the legislation is inappropriate. Times are still very

difficult for businesses, and many firms have no guarantee of work next week, let alone next month or next year. So, for companies, the ability to employ and dismiss staff on a reasonably quick basis — I highlight the phrase “reasonably quick basis” — is crucial to their survival in these difficult economic times. This recession will not go on for ever; there is an end to it. Therefore, I feel that implementing the legislation at this stage is, perhaps, lacking a little in judgement. Therefore, I urge the Minister to express concern to his counterpart over the timing of the legislation.

The ICTU's view is that the legislation will deal with the issue of agency workers being the:

“second-class citizens of the employment sphere.”

We have to be careful that employed citizens do not go into the second-class citizen role in the employment sphere. Those employees have gone through a rigorous recruitment process, and employers have invested time, resources and experience in them. Agency staff would then be given virtually the same rights. We are talking not about an unfair environment for workers but about the resources that are invested in employees. A balance has to be struck to ensure that agency workers do not force full-time employees into a position of second-class citizenship.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to debate this matter, and I welcome the Minister here today to hear about some of the discussions that we have had in the Committee for Employment and Learning.

When departmental officials came to the Committee to provide a briefing on the agency workers directive, we discovered that trade unions here had not managed to reach agreement with the Department. Alarm bells immediately went off in my head about that lack of agreement, and, with a bit of probing and questioning, it became clear that the trade union movement here had strong opinions on this but the 12-week arrangement that the TUC was bringing forward was out of kilter with what ICTU wanted to do.

A TUC report published in 2007 shows that more than half of agency staff would rather have a permanent job; a quarter of agency staff are in assignments of more than a year and are not just filling a temporary need; agency staff in post for more than a year do not gain the

enhanced employment rights that other workers enjoy after 12 months in a job, as they normally do not have the legal rights of an employee; agency workers have no security of tenure and can be made unemployed at any time; and agency staff are paid 80p for every pound paid to permanent staff doing a similar job, according to a TUC analysis of official statistics. Yet the TUC was party to the agreement reached on the other side of the water.

The TUC has no remit here. According to a letter from Eugene McGlone to Danny Kennedy in January, the TUC has had no remit here since 1893. Nevertheless, ICTU, which is the trade union organisation responsible for coming to this agreement, has been, if you like, frozen out. ICTU declined to sign up to the existing agreement because the introduction of a 12-week qualifying period would deny many temporary agency workers equal treatment. That means that serious questions remain about going down that route.

I was unable to attend the Employment and Learning Committee last week, when the Law Centre, ICTU and others gave presentations, but much in the papers that members received made sense. At a previous Committee meeting, one of the issues that I raised was the right to maternity leave and maternity pay for agency workers. I welcome the right of women to attend antenatal clinics and so on, but I am concerned that enhanced contractual maternity pay is not included in the directive and that the draft regulations do not provide for entitlement to maternity leave. Therefore, again, I am deeply concerned about the way we are going on this issue and the fact that we are not taking into consideration the rights of some of the most vulnerable people, such as elderly people, those with low educational attainment and migrant workers. It is incumbent on us to ensure that we protect the rights of such people.

I was in the Chamber on the day of Jim Allister's speech. He was also vocal on the issue in Committee, where his view was contrary to mine and that of my colleague Barry McElduff. Jim Allister — I paraphrase rather than directly quote him — stood in the Chamber and talked about the Assembly being judged by how it treats minorities. Well, I think that our society will be judged on how we treat our minorities. We have a situation here in which the most vulnerable could be exploited.

It is also worth mentioning that, given the current economic situation, people have been made redundant or have lost their job. Agency or temporary work might be all that is on offer, particularly for the many unemployed skilled workers, notably in manufacturing.

Mr Ross: The Member made a valid point about the economic situation and how many people are unemployed. There is an argument that many European directives that place additional costs and burdens on businesses, rather than allowing businesses to reinvest to expand and create more jobs, will result in jobs being lost. Does she not buy into the argument that some regulations cost jobs rather than resulting in desperately wanted new jobs in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute added to her time.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I do not buy that argument. As we work our way out of the current economic climate and look for workers, we will be judged on how well we look after those who best protect workers and encourage them back into the economy. We and the Agricultural Wages Board debated the fact that we cannot get agricultural workers to work at minimum wage levels. We need to ensure that their rights are protected and their skills recognised.

David McIlveen made the point that we were powerless, but we are not. Indeed, as Agriculture Minister, I went to Europe many times to argue that we should have regional variations and should seek derogations to get the best deal for the people whom we represent. Those are the people who vote us into the Assembly and look to us to enhance their protections. Therefore, I ask the Minister to look seriously at this issue again. Even at this late stage, try to find agreement with ICTU —

Mr Speaker: The Member must bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Gildernew: — and try to make a better fist of it than thus far.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.44 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Legal Aid

1. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the impact of his decision to reduce fees paid to lawyers in legal aid cases. (AQO 149/11-15)

4. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to resolve the dispute about legal aid fees. (AQO 152/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 4 together. The new remuneration arrangements came into effect on 13 April 2011. Since then and up to 24 June, 254 defendants have been left without representation in Crown Court cases due to the withdrawal of the solicitors' firms that had previously represented them. A further 19 defendants may be unrepresented in cases where 13 firms have not notified the court service that they may have withdrawn, but no defence certificate for legal aid in the Crown Court proceedings has been applied for.

My officials in the Courts and Tribunals Service have written to all solicitors' firms in Northern Ireland asking whether they are willing to take on Crown Court work under the new remuneration arrangements. They have compiled a list of firms willing to carry out legally aided Crown Court work. Eight firms are on the list. The list has been provided to all defendants who are unrepresented and to defendants who, it is thought, may not have representation. The Courts and Tribunals Service has also compiled a list of barristers who are willing to work at the new rates, including barristers from outside Northern Ireland. The list has been provided to any solicitor who is experiencing difficulty in instructing counsel. In addition, three firms of solicitors from England and Wales have

approached the Courts and Tribunals Service to ask about being included on the list. We are seeking to confirm whether the Law Society will allow them to take on work in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his response. I assure him of my support and that of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber in his attempt to lower Northern Ireland's disgracefully large legal aid bill. In seeking an alternative way forward, has the Minister considered instigating a US-style public defender's office? In pursuing and examining that, has he considered how easy that might be to do?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Hamilton for his supplementary question. I am considering all possible options to ensure that defendants have access to justice. It is my hope and my effort to date to ensure that defendants obtain solicitors and barristers under the usual arrangements who are prepared to work at the new legally enforced rates of remuneration. I could also invite solicitors and barristers from outside Northern Ireland to take on Crown Court work on the same basis as applies. As I said already, we have had indications of interest, without seeking them, from firms of solicitors in England and Wales that are keen to work here.

Another option would be for the Legal Services Commission to arrange for legal advice and representation to be provided directly to unrepresented defendants. Mr Hamilton referred to a US-style public defender's system. I suspect that that might create concerns about the quality of justice; however, it already operates successfully in part in England and Wales. The legislation is already in place under the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 for the Legal Services Commission to engage directly should it wish and should it be necessary to ensure access to justice for defendants.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer to that very interesting question from my colleague Simon Hamilton. The Minister has said previously that, if we could not get a resolution to the current situation, he would take another look at the options. From the tone of what the Minister said, I gather that he is either being driven or is willingly looking outside the box on the issue. Does one of those options not include a compromise with local lawyers, or does he have options, other than those that he

stated, that would be a resolution? Does he see that forthcoming?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McNarry for his supplementary question. He talked about the possibility of compromise. However, the House should be aware that the new rates of pay under the regulations are now in force. They are legally in place because the regulations were laid before the House and were accepted by the Committee and, by default, by the House as a whole. Therefore, there is no compromise on changing the rates. There is no way that David Ford, by the stroke of a pen, can give solicitors and barristers what they want. The compromise — *[Interruption.]* There is no legal process by which the Minister could make a compromise, if that is what is being talked about.

There is also no way in which, within budget, we could pay the rates that are sought by certain members of the legal profession. I have offered a significantly earlier than usual review of the new rates to see where there are anomalies and to see whether there are issues that need to be addressed in reforming the rates that are now in force. However, that requires solicitors and barristers to work normally so that we can ascertain what the facts of the case are. I believe that that is a compromise. That is what I have offered to the Bar Council and the Law Society, and my officials have written to them about the detail of it. I hope that we will see constructive engagement in order that we will see defendants being represented and victims of crime seeing their cases proceed speedily.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Minister give an assurance that defendants' trials will not be unduly delayed as a result of this issue?

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for asking a question about what is clearly an important issue for defendants and victims. It is important for them to see that the cases are proceeded with. Given where we are and because most of these Crown Court cases are unlikely to proceed before September or October at the earliest, the reality is that there is no significant delay at the moment, although there is the potential that some people could be delayed in making a valid bail application, if they are not properly represented. As my first priority, I am seeking to get the existing system working properly, with Northern Ireland solicitors and

barristers carrying out the duties at the rates of remuneration that are now in force. If that does not turn out to be the case, I will certainly not shrink from other options to ensure that there is access to justice for defendants and justice being seen to be done for victims.

Mr A Maginness: It is unhelpful for the Minister to adopt an uncompromising approach to this problem. It would be better if the Minister reopened discussions with the Law Society and the Bar Council to see whether there is some basis for a compromise, as Mr McNarry suggested, on the basis of their proposals, which—

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to come to a question.

Mr A Maginness: — were verified as being within budget.

Mr Ford: I fear that Mr Maginness has not appreciated the point that I have tried to make: the new regulations are in force, and the Assembly has accepted the new rates of remuneration. Therefore, the suggestion that I am uncompromising is completely off the mark. The simple position is that proposals were put forward by the Department, accepted by the Committee and not rejected by the Assembly and, therefore, have the force of law. No compromise can be made about those rates.

The compromise is that I have offered an early review. We will see how the arrangements work and whether there are anomalies. I have engaged with the Law Society and the Bar Council; I have offered them that. I have asked my officials to engage in detail with them, and that is the compromise. The compromise is not to suggest somehow that I should accept from the two professional bodies a proposal that was uncoded, could not be coded, would have significantly exceeded the budget available for legal aid and would have resulted in cost pressures being met from other aspects of public expenditure in Northern Ireland that, I believe, deserve equal priority. I suspect that few Members would wish to see us shifting funds from the budget for health and social services, for example, into the funding of legal aid, when Northern Ireland will still have the most generous system in western Europe.

Mr Allister: With regard to the unfortunate situation that has arisen, has the Minister any concern about the impact on the quality of

justice? I ask him to bear in mind the incident in Newry Crown Court on 9 June, when a novice solicitor made the schoolboy error of being willing to see someone returned on a charge where they could face 14 years' imprisonment, without ever having received or read the papers in the case. Is there not a live concern, therefore, about the impact on the quality of justice? Might that concern be intensified if —

Mr Deputy Speaker: One question please.

Mr Allister: — if, during this dispute, there are difficulties dealing with custody interviews?

Mr Ford: I am not quite sure precisely what Mr Allister meant by his last remark. Let me make it clear that I am not here to discuss any individual case. What is absolutely clear is that I am committed to ensuring access to justice and the best quality of justice, but it also has to be the best quality of justice that is affordable. The simple position is that it was not possible, with the budget that I am obliged to live within, to meet the rates of remuneration requested by certain solicitors and certain members of the Bar. I am seeking to provide the highest possible quality of justice within a budget, not on an open-ended expenditure list.

Craigavon: Rioting

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the cost of the riotous behaviour over 12 July 2010 in the Craigavon area. (AQO 150/11-15)

Mr Ford: Regrettably, there were several incidents of disorder in the Craigavon area on 12 July 2010, principally in Lurgan. Those included attacks on police officers, using petrol bombs and other missiles, and the hijacking of vehicles, including a train carrying 55 passengers. The Police Service advised that the cost of officer hours for policing 12 July in Lurgan last year was approximately £41,000. That figure covers the total cost of the policing operation. In addition, there was the cost of the damage to the hijacked train, which amounted to over £20,000, and the cost of damage to the other vehicles that were hijacked. That is not to mention the cost in lost revenue for local businesses and the potential impact on tourism. However, there are wider costs than the financial ones. Those who suffer most are clearly the local community. There can be no doubt that that type of wanton and destructive violence has

an unwelcome and detrimental impact on those who live in the area. The perpetrators need to wake up to that.

In the past couple of days, Northern Ireland has occupied the headlines for our sporting excellence, bringing with it the prospect of continuing to improve our reputation internationally. Unfortunately, it is not just a matter of Craigavon on 12 July. Following the scenes of violence last night in east Belfast, that image has been replaced by one of rioting. Quite simply, those scenes were a disgrace, and I condemn those involved for the damage, fear and disruption that they created in their own community. There is no justification for the scenes we saw last night. I welcome the efforts of the police and community representatives who stepped forward to seek to restore order.

It is vital that the Executive and Members of the Assembly, with other agencies and community leaders, work together to build a shared future and to divert our young people from becoming involved in this criminal and destructive activity in Craigavon, Belfast or anywhere else.

Mr Moutray: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I concur with your remarks about last night's trouble. Given the significant financial resources spent in relation to riotous behaviour in Craigavon last July, will the Minister outline what effective measures will be put in place to circumvent such happenings this year and to allow the people of Craigavon a peaceful holiday period?

Mr Ford: I am sure that the Member does not expect me to go into the detail of any operational planning that the Police Service might be putting into place, which is a responsibility for the Chief Constable and not for me. The responsibility that we in the Department have is to do what we can to promote diversionary activity, to build on the community safety work being done by my officials and in conjunction with Craigavon Community Safety Partnership and to ensure that every possible effort is put forward in seeking to divert people from that kind of trouble. Unfortunately, however, because of what we have seen in Belfast over the past few days, I suspect that we may expect to face certain difficulties this summer, which I believe every Member of the House would wish to avoid.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that, where riots can be linked to or associated with

particular organisers, those organisers should get the bill for the damage caused to public property, in the same way as football clubs are heavily penalised when their overenthusiastic supporters run riot and rip up the seats?

Mr Ford: I suspect we probably all agree with Mr Dallat that, where people are responsible for organising riots, they should be made to pay for it. I am not sure, however, that that is a practical proposition, as opposed to something that would be an aspiration.

2.15 pm

Road Safety: Scramblers and Quad Bikes

3. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to introduce legislation in relation to scramblers and quad bikes. (AQO 151/11-15)

Mr Ford: Road safety matters are primarily the responsibility of the Department of the Environment (DOE), but related issues, such as criminal law and enforcement, clearly fall to my Department. Therefore, I work closely with the Environment Minister to address road traffic and safety matters, including problems with off-road vehicles.

On the justice side, the law against nuisance vehicles was strengthened in 2008. New police powers were put in place to seize and retain vehicles that were being used to alarm, distress or annoy. We all know how dangerous scramblers and off-road vehicles can be. That was exemplified by the recent tragic death in north Belfast of 12-year-old Daniel Mooney, who fell from the back of a scrambler. I know that Members will join me in extending heartfelt sympathies to Daniel's parents, relations and friends on their bereavement.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, extend my sympathies to Daniel's family and to everyone who has lost someone as a result of a tragic accident involving a quad or scrambler throughout the years. It is a massive issue, and it was picked up in the recent canvassing campaign prior to the elections. Quads and scramblers are being used in some of our parks and fields and are destroying them. People are buying quad bikes or scramblers without having tax or insurance. I appreciate that some of the responsibility lies with the DOE, but there needs to be joint working between the Minister's

Department and the Department of the Environment. Hopefully, we will see some sort of legislation in the future.

Mr Ford: I am entirely open to appropriate further legislation. However, in the context of nuisance vehicles and issues relating to insurance, there is probably more of a case to be made for enforcing existing legislation than passing new legislation. However, if the Member or any other Member has specific suggestions, I will work with the Minister of the Environment to see what can be done.

Mr Campbell: In addition to the tragic death that the Minister and the Member opposite referred to, there are occasions when antisocial behaviour is linked to off-road vehicles. Will the Minister undertake to work in conjunction with the Department of the Environment to ensure that it will try to diminish the effects, particularly on elderly people, of young people driving those vehicles at weekends and accessing land and property illegally?

Mr Ford: The Member has highlighted the sort of issue that is raised by vehicles being used to annoy and create disturbance. The detail is to ensure that we work proactively to cut down on that. For example, a number of community safety partnerships have sought to educate people away from that kind of behaviour, as well as enforcing the law when it happens.

Mr Durkan: I agree with those who spoke about the seriousness of the issue. It causes a nuisance right across the North. Will the Minister tell us how many of those nuisance vehicles have been seized since the introduction of the law?

Mr Ford: I cannot give the Member the detail of how many vehicles have been seized since the introduction of the law, but I know that there have been only two vehicle seizures in the past six months. There may frequently be a safety issue with regard to dealing with the incidents where they actually occur. It can be difficult to safely stop and apprehend people who use those vehicles. Therefore, the police need the assistance of local communities to identify perpetrators so that they can be dealt with somewhere other than where the incident is actually happening.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 was grouped with question 1.

Community Safety

5. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of the policing and justice budget has been allocated for community safety in the current financial year. (AQO 153/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that approximately 15% of the core budget of the Department of Justice has been allocated to community safety in the current financial year. That figure excludes funding allocated to arm's-length bodies and agencies. In monetary terms, it means that just over £6.9 million has been allocated to community safety for this financial year. However, Members should note that, as well as allocating funding directly to community safety, my Department ensures that additional resources are available through the requirement to secure match funding. The net result is that significant funding has been allocated to community safety in the current year.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the success of many of the locally based community safety forums, such as the West Belfast Community Safety Forum, which works in partnership with organisations that have a responsibility for community safety, will the Minister give us an assurance that they will be resourced and financed in the way that they need to be to carry on and develop those initiatives?

Mr Ford: I appreciate the point that Ms McCann is raising. I cannot give her an absolute guarantee that the West Belfast Community Safety Forum will be funded indefinitely. However, I can confirm that funding for the facilitator post has been extended until 31 March 2012 so that time is taken to assess the most appropriate model for delivering local engagement on community safety in west Belfast. Clearly, there are community safety issues on which we would like to spend significantly more money. However, the fact is that budgetary pressures on the Department do not always make that easy. I am concerned to ensure that money that is allocated to community safety from limited resources is used in the best possible way and to assess the good work that is being done both by formal community safety partnerships and by informal local groups such as the one that the Member highlighted.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Minister ensure that the new policing and community safety partnerships act in accordance with the spirit of the Patten

report so that local neighbourhood policing is truly community policing?

Mr Ford: Certainly. I am happy to endorse Mr Eastwood's comment. It is certainly the Department's intention to put forward proposals for the new amalgamated or extended policing and community safety partnerships so that the spirit that has gone through the district policing partnerships (DPP) since the Patten report will be carried forward. Some Committee members were concerned that the consultation document did not reflect that fully. It has, therefore, been revised to take account of views that have been expressed by Members of the House.

Mr Lyttle: What is the Minister's assessment of how well the various Departments' interventions and initiatives on community safety are being joined up?

Mr Ford: The Member asks a question that applies to every aspect of public expenditure. There is absolutely no doubt that we have seen good work done in many community safety partnerships to join up the responsibilities of different bodies. The way in which the new policing and community safety partnerships will function will bring a number of statutory bodies into a wider role while preserving what Mr Eastwood has just referred to: the existing pattern of DPPs in the policing committees of those partnerships. It seems absolutely clear that, if we are really to make communities safer, we need to look at the role of a number of Departments, not simply the Department of Justice (DoJ) and its agencies, to ensure that we get maximum benefit. I am certainly keen to work with other Departments to ensure that that benefit is maximised and to get the best possible results for the entire community.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

6. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the current situation regarding payments under the gratuity scheme for the police part-time Reserve. (AQO 154/11-15)

10. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State, the Northern Ireland Office and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs concerning the proposal to tax the £20m gratuity package for the police part-time Reserve. (AQO 158/11-15)

Mr Ford: With permission, I will answer questions 6 and 10 together. The current situation with regard to the part-time Reserve gratuity scheme is that 6,228 applications for the gratuity payment were received. They have all been put through the verification process. It is the Department's intention to make payment to verified applicants as soon as possible. We are, however, awaiting the view of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the tax and National Insurance treatment of those payments. Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of justice, when I was given responsibility for administering the police part-time Reserve gratuity scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office. HMRC advice has consistently been that, since those payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any existing exemptions, they will be liable to tax and National Insurance. Liability will depend on the individual's tax status. The DOJ has always understood that HMRC is able to operate only within the parameters of existing tax law. However, I have raised the issue again with the Chancellor with a view to finding an equitable solution. I have also written previously to the Secretary of State with regard to tax and National Insurance issues. DOJ officials have been in contact with NIO officials on a number of occasions.

Mr Hussey: I declare an interest. Does the Minister agree that the attempt by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to take more than its pound of flesh — £7.5 million or £9 million, depending on whatever figure it uses — is totally unacceptable and that, perhaps, it should use the system that was used by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR)?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot agree with the Member's assessment that HMRC seeks more than its pound of flesh. As I understand it, the issues are different from those that were raised by the Ministry of Defence in connection with the UDR and RIR gratuity. All that my officials who seek to administer the scheme can do is to follow the advice that they are given.

Mr Spratt: Despite all Mr Hussey's blustering about the issue, will the Minister confirm that more than 50% of the initial applications had to be returned? Will he also confirm that whatever time is necessary will be taken to verify those

claims, so that everyone in the system is allowed to be included in the appeal process?

Mr Ford: I certainly confirm that a significant number of the original applications had to be returned in order to verify certain aspects. However, I cannot be sure whether it was exactly the proportion that Mr Spratt speaks of. Those who administer the scheme seek to do so as speedily as possible and in line with the law under which they are required to operate.

Mr Buchanan: Does the Minister agree that it is totally unacceptable that the package that was given as a gratuity is now being taxed? Will he do all in his power to ensure that the proposed tax on that gratuity is waived?

Mr Ford: All I can do is administer the scheme that was handed to me by the Northern Ireland Office in accordance with the law. As I said in my initial answer, given the concerns that were expressed, I took the opportunity to raise the issue again with the Chancellor of the Exchequer when I met him last week. It had been raised with the Prime Minister the previous week. The only way in which any change will be made to the scheme is if additional funding is granted. Other than that, I can work only within the legislation that I am required to work under and within the sum of money that was set aside by the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place for question 7.

Rosemary Nelson Inquiry

8. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Justice what action he intends to take as a result of the Rosemary Nelson inquiry report. (AQO 156/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have read the inquiry report, and my assessment is that the findings of the inquiry relate to a policing and security environment that has been largely overtaken by fundamental reforms of the police. In addition, many of the issues relate to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), the Security Service and the NIO, which are outside my area of responsibility. I have, however, taken actions that, I think, will be helpful. I have spoken to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and have been given assurances about the current limited home protection scheme, in particular assurances that adequate arrangements are in place to ensure that the problems that occurred in the

past will not happen again. I have also written to the PSNI and the PPS about the security of documentary material and to the Law Society to ascertain whether it has any remaining concerns about the protection of its members.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the Minister will agree that the report marks a seminal moment in the acid test of whether the Assembly is capable of taking the difficult decisions outworking themselves from the devolution of policing and justice. Does the Minister have any intention of weeding out of his Department the securocrats formerly attached to the NIO who were so severely criticised in the Rosemary Nelson report?

Mr Ford: I must say that I find that question interesting, particularly when I remember the comments made by Mr McDevitt as we finished the debate on the Justice Bill before the election. He referred to the Justice Bill as a sign that things had changed. He actually said that, when he looked down the Chamber and saw the people sitting in the Box, he could think of them as being from the DOJ and not the NIO. On that basis, it seems slightly surprising that, faced with a report dealing with events that happened 12 or more years ago, he is somehow keen to present officials of the Department of Justice as if they were NIO securocrats. I do not recognise that as a description of anyone who works in the Department of Justice. It is not what I see in the attitude of those who work for and with me on a daily basis. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Ford: I see people who are committed to working under a devolved system in entirely different circumstances and are keen to work in a different way.

I must say that I also find it funny that we seem to be in a position where those who were members of the RUC can be reformed as members of the PSNI and those who have backgrounds that include criminal records can be reformed as Members of the Assembly but anyone who has ever worked for the Northern Ireland Office is somehow tainted for life, meaning that it is impossible for them to be considered as having a new way of operating.

While we are on the topic, there are no officials in the Department of Justice who were members of the Senior Civil Service at the time that is covered by the Rosemary Nelson report.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Justice.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

A Member: You cannot take a point of order during Question Time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is a point of order that relates to this Question Time. I am taking the point of order.

Mr Givan: A number of Members asked supplementary questions to question 1. I do not know if some of those Members are still members of the Bar, but it may well have been necessary for them to declare an interest, and I do not recall that being done. I accept that Members do not declare interests on all occasions, and that is fine. However, I would like the Speaker's Office to rule on that issue and come back to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is correct that any Member speaking on any issue in which they have a particular interest should declare that interest. Under Standing Order 69(4), Members must declare any interest before they speak in any debate or proceedings.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for neglecting to declare the fact that I have been and am a member of the Bar of Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would also like to associate myself with that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Deputy Speaker, it has been well known for many years that I have been a practising member of the Northern Ireland Bar.

Regional Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Railways: North-west

1. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Regional Development when the upgrade to the railway line in the north-west will commence and be completed. (AQO 164/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I thank the Member for his question. The original plans for the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay project would have resulted in the completion of the project by 2013, and that was to coincide with the introduction to service of all 20 new trains. However, the Budget that was approved by the Assembly and the Executive makes provision for the commencement of the track relay in 2014. That reflects the capital budget that is available — £20 million in year 4 of the Budget period. It is not possible to start the work on the main relay earlier than 2014 for that reason.

The project was originally envisaged to take two years to complete, and, on that basis, I hope that the project will be completed in the financial year 2015-16. A revision of the current approved economic appraisal will be required, and that will also be subject to funding in the next comprehensive spending review.

Translink has identified interim measures to be taken to ensure the continued running and safety of the line up to 2014. It is its intention to maintain services until the project is completed, and funding has been provided for that purpose over the next two years.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. In respect of the Derry to Coleraine line, can the Minister assure me that looping systems will be implemented as commutes to Derry city will terminate before 9.00 am?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Some changes are envisaged for the Coleraine to Londonderry stretch of the line, and I have no doubt that those will be appropriately managed by Translink.

Mr Dallat: I have enormous sympathy for the Minister. He inherited this wanton neglect, which should have been attended to during the last Assembly. Given that Derry will be the City of Culture in 2013, will the Minister make a serious case to the Executive to find the necessary funding for the project? I find it an absolute disgrace that an intercity service will have speed limits imposed on it at a time when the numbers of those who use it have doubled. I appeal to the Minister, and I attach no blame to him for the neglect of the past.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for the non-attachment of blame. I have ongoing concerns, but, in the current financial climate, particularly with respect to my departmental budget, I must be honest with the House and say that the earliest date that I am able to indicate is 2014. If things improve, we will seek to bring the project forward. I am aware of the Member's long-standing interest in the issue. It gives me no pleasure to relay that news to the House, but I have to be honest.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for that information. Had it not been for the Assembly, we would not have a Belfast to Londonderry line because Minister Spellar would have closed it.

Will the Minister take back to Translink an issue that has been unresolved for some time? I refer to an express service from Ballymena to Belfast. Given the important place that Ballymena plays in relation to the transport hub of the region, it is important that we have an improved service. With the introduction of new trains —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The question is about —

Mr Storey: In that case, this line will not be sacrificed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that questions should be short. There are many questions to go through, and statements are not required at this time.

Mr Kennedy: I will draw the Member's remarks to the attention of Translink.

Mr Swann: My question will be like myself — short. Work on the railway line is likely to be disruptive for passengers. Will the Minister advise how Translink will minimise disruption for passengers from Ballymena and Ballymoney during that work?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Unfortunately, there will be some inconvenience, and it will be Translink's responsibility to manage that. I have every confidence that it will do so professionally. I am happy to be kept updated on progress and will seek updates regularly if particular problems emerge.

Cullybackey Link Road

2. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the planned link road around Cullybackey. (AQO 165/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has been involved in discussions with the potential housing developers as part of the planning application on the line of the Cullybackey throughpass. I can advise that an agreed housing layout, which includes the construction of the central portion of the throughpass, received planning approval in June 2007. A revised planning application was submitted in July 2008, which also included the throughpass element, and was being processed by the Planning Service but has now been withdrawn by the developer. However, the original approval remains live.

To date, the developer has not started work on the housing development, and there is no indication of when it might progress. The completion of the throughpass is not included in any current major works programme. However, Roads Service has stated its commitment to the completion of the remainder of the route and has progressed preliminary design of the throughpass.

Roads Service has considered how the scheme might be provided. It would probably be in two or more parts, following on from the section to be constructed by the developer. As with all proposed works, delivery of the throughpass will be subject to the programming of schemes on a priority basis, successful acquisition of lands and availability of funding. At present, the scheme is not high enough on our priority list to secure funding. However, I assure the Member that it remains part of Roads Service's plans, and the service intends to avail itself of any opportunities for progress by developers or other funding opportunities that may become available.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am conscious that, for anyone outside North Antrim, this issue does not have a lot of relevance, but it is an important issue in the constituency. I have spoken to a number of my council colleagues in north Antrim, and some of them bear testimony to the fact that the issue has been discussed since the 1960s, so it has been on the agenda for some time. I am conscious that budgets are tight. The Minister mentioned that the issue is not a priority. When will it become a priority? When will it be our turn?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the Member's supplementary question. It seems that almost every road that has not been completed was promised in the 1960s. I understand the

importance of the road to Cullybackey. It is a throughpass not a bypass. In the scheme of things, it does not represent a major investment, but there have been unfortunate hold-ups.

It was hoped that the scheme would run in conjunction with the planned development. As that development has not taken place, we will continue to monitor the situation to see whether earlier progress can be made.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister agree that there is great disquiet, not just about the failure of the Cullybackey link, but about the many smaller road proposals that are on hold because of the cut in capital expenditure, while the A5 proposals seem to sail on impervious to the current downturn in economic conditions?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, and I understand his point. There is increasing debate and reflection on whether we should be improving existing roads instead of attempting to build new ones. That comment does not relate to the current planning inquiry into the A5 and A8 schemes. I am anxious to await the outcome of those public inquiries and will give careful consideration to their findings. However, the question of improving or maintaining existing roads goes back to the current financial position that I find myself in as Minister. It is quite a challenge.

Mr Allister: I am disappointed that the Minister was unable to bring any timely good news about the Cullybackey throughpass. Is the essence of his answer that, by hitching that scheme to the planned development, several years have been lost? If that is so, does that not increase the need for Roads Service to treat the throughpass as a Roads Service scheme in its own right and, as such, to complete it?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his contribution. All schemes have to be considered according to their importance and cost, but they must meet a number of priorities. Unfortunately, the Cullybackey throughpass does not appear to have made progress on that. That is not to say that Roads Service will not continue to consider the scheme's potential. However, it was hoped that the housing development project linked to the throughpass improvement would advance the scheme. Unfortunately, time and other factors, including the housing downturn, contributed to the lack of progress.

Roads: Ards Peninsula

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to reduce the number of public liability claims made against Roads Service as a result of poor road surfaces in the Ards Peninsula.
(AQO 166/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, although given his success and prowess in the art competition, I half expected it to be in the form of a rhyming couplet.

I acknowledge that there is considerable room for improvement in Northern Ireland's road network. I remind the House that I inherited a budget and programme of improvement works that limit the finance available for structural maintenance and will result in further reductions in conditions during the next four years. However, given the limited funding that I have for road maintenance, I assure the Member that the Ards Peninsula is receiving its fair share of the available funds. That said, Roads Service has in place an ongoing roads maintenance regime, which means that all adopted roads and footways, including those in the Ards Peninsula, are inspected regularly, and any defects are noted for repair.

2.45 pm

Essentially, the safety standards and procedures currently in operation establish frequencies — I will have to speak to my officials — for road inspections that are dependent on traffic volumes and specify response times for the repair of defects. The safety standards were last reviewed in 2009, and they continue to provide a systematic approach to road maintenance management.

I reassure the Member that the maintenance of road and footway surfaces and their underlying structure continues to be a high priority for Roads Service. Throughout the current financial year, funds will continue to be directed to the maintenance and upgrading of roads services across the Ards Borough Council area. That investment is aimed at improving road conditions and therefore reducing the likelihood of public liability claims.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer. If he intends to do poetic justice to my question, perhaps I can remind him of the personal promises that he has made to me —

imaginary or otherwise — on what needs to be done in the Ards Peninsula. So, in light of the Audit Office's concerns about the proportion of resources used for patching and repairs and compensation, does the Minister acknowledge the necessity of maintaining our roads? Will he advise us on what schemes are planned for the Ards area and tell us whether they include very necessary repairs in Ballyhalbert?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The maintenance regime is important. Inspection frequencies vary from daily cycles for motorways to four-monthly cycles for carriageways that carry low volumes of traffic. There are safety standards that were last reviewed in 2006 and continue to provide a systematic approach to road maintenance management.

I assure him that all of the roads in the Ards Peninsula area are regularly reviewed and, where problems exist, we seek to take action to identify them. My officials are currently embarking on their regular tour of local district councils to present the divisional manager's report, which contains the more detailed schemes for Ards and the other council areas. I will ensure that the Member is provided with an early copy of the list of schemes that are planned for the Ards Borough Council area.

Mr Hamilton: Through the Minister, I congratulate the local section office in Ards for its resurfacing of a large stretch of the Kircubbin to Portaferry road recently. If and when resources permit, will he ensure that equal concentration is given to the other side of the Ards Peninsula and the A2, particularly around Ballywalter, Ballyhalbert and Portavogie?

Mr Kennedy: I hear the Member's plea and will refer it back to our local officials.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his responses.

I do not know how long it has been since the Minister visited the Ards Peninsula, but I invite him to come down as soon as possible, as Ards Borough Council has invited him. I will show him the Ballyeasborough Road, the Gransha Road, the Ballygelagh Road and the Springfield Road.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr McCarthy: Those roads are abysmal, particularly after the Water Service has left them. That is a big problem: when the Water

Service leaves a road, the Roads Service does not want to come back.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member knows well that this is Question Time.

Mr McCarthy: I am asking a question. When will the Roads Service come and tell the Water Service that roads of the type I describe need to be replaced and resurfaced?

Mr Kennedy: My sense is that the Member has run out of road. *[Laughter.]*

However, he does make an important point. I have the same representations made to me, as a Member, by constituents who are every bit as concerned about the condition, maintenance and structure of local roads. That gives rise to the debate that I mentioned earlier about whether it is better to maintain the roads that we have or simply build new roads. I am interested in the Member's views on that and the views of other Members, if they wish to relay them to me.

However, I pay tribute to all my staff in the section offices for their ability to identify road projects and improvements. They are working very hard with limited resources, and they deserve congratulations, not criticism.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Car Parking: Charges

5. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the review of on-street car parking charges. (AQO 168/11-15)

10. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the potential impact of on-street car parking charges on town centre regeneration. (AQO 173/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. He nearly got the answer for question 4. With the Deputy Speaker's permission, I will reply to questions 5 and 10 together.

I am currently carrying out a review of my Department's proposal to introduce on-street parking charges in 30 towns across Northern Ireland. I intend to make an announcement on the issue in due course. As part of the review, I met a number of local representatives and traders from across Northern Ireland and listened to their concerns. I will carefully

consider their views on the proposal before I make my decision.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for that response. Lisburn already has on-street car parking charging. A complaint often made to representatives is that if charging was brought in to ease traffic movement, why is charging starting at 8.00 am and continuing through to 6.00 pm? When the Minister is looking at the review, can it be considered that those times should change? If it is to do with traffic movement, charging could be from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm, as opposed to the current arrangements. Perhaps that can be brought into the wider review, not just in Lisburn but in other areas.

Mr Kennedy: The Member raises a fair and reasonable point, which I am prepared to look at as quickly as possible. A great deal of consultation was undertaken to agree a scheme acceptable to all parties prior to the introduction of charging for on-street parking in Lisburn and Newry a few years ago. The Member raised an issue about timings for waiting restrictions, and I will look at that as closely as I can.

Mr B McCrea: Since we are on the subject of Lisburn, is the Minister aware of the challenges facing traders there when they seek to compete with out-of-town shopping centres? The cost of parking, not to mention the attitude that people take when confronted with “redcoats”, is a material factor in economic development. Will he take that on board during his review?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. As part of the review, I have met representatives of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA), and we had some discussion on the issue that the Member raised. I found that insightful as I begin to reflect and finalise my thinking on on-street charges.

A great many towns in Northern Ireland — traditional market towns and new cities such as Lisburn and Newry — have considerable concerns about out-of-town shopping and its impact on the local, indigenous retail trade. Those are slightly wider issues to the review on which I wanted to proceed on taking office, but they are worthy of serious consideration.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the review have any

impact on, for example, some of the potential residents-only parking schemes?

Mr Kennedy: The Member, I think, was not in his place for the question that he tabled. We had a prepared answer, so he might as well have it.

The Member will be aware that attempts by my Department’s Roads Service to introduce the first residents’ parking schemes in the inner city areas of Belfast were met with considerable local opposition. Initially, residents were concerned about the proposed cost of a permit. Other issues included the number of permits available, and where short-term parking would be available on a pay-and-display basis.

Although we have no immediate plans to re-engage with residents in the Donegall Pass area, for instance, we will add that neighbourhood to the list of areas for future consideration. We have sought to re-engage with the local community in the Markets area. Progress on the issue has been very slow, and at some point I will have to question whether it justifies the investment of time and money by my officials. Unless we can see early progress being made, my sense is that this will run into the sand.

Ms Lo: With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to ask a question following on from the answer that the Minister just gave. I know that there have been difficulties with negotiations on the residents’ parking scheme for Donegall Pass and the Markets, but will the Minister consider extending it outwards? I know that residents in Stranmillis and the lower Ormeau Road are very interested in taking up that scheme.

Mr Kennedy: I am certainly aware that other areas have indicated interest in such a scheme, but putting together a scheme, in real terms, that is acceptable to residents has proved difficult so far. Therefore, at some point I will have to make a judgement as to whether serious progress is possible or whether we are simply going around in a rather circular argument.

Rathlin Island

6. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made in implementing the Rathlin Island policy and action plan. (AQO 169/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Rathlin Island policy was endorsed by the Executive in February 2010, and the action plan was agreed last September. Following an invitation from the Rathlin Development and Community Association, I hope to visit the island in July to meet not only the people but the puffins and to hear of progress that has been made on implementing the action plan to date. I will review that when I chair the third meeting of the Minister's forum with the islanders and senior officials from all Northern Ireland Departments in the early autumn.

Mr Storey: I welcome the fact that the Minister is to visit the island. He will see the puffins, and I am sure that, as a member of the Loyal Orders, he will be glad to know that it is the only place in Northern Ireland where orange feet walk without the requirement of an 11/1. When visiting the island, will the Minister ensure that progress is made? I have been concerned for some time that, although the model is admirable, his Department, along with other Departments, needs to show a greater commitment to delivering on specific issues that have been raised through the process to date.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the supplementary question. I have no intention of forming a concerned residents' group for the puffins, which, I understand, largely fly off around the Twelfth. That might be something that others could consider.

I take the point that the Member makes. It is a realistic point. I am very pleased that my responsibilities as Minister for Regional Development include responsibility for Rathlin Island, and I am looking forward to the visit and to meeting the Rathlin Development and Community Association, discussing the issues of concern to it and carrying those forward, not only in my Department but in the other Departments in the Executive.

A5 Dual Carriageway: Public Inquiry

7. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the public inquiry on the A5 dualling scheme. (AQO 170/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The public inquiry for the A5 western transport corridor commenced on 9 May 2011 and will run for approximately eight weeks. The first two weeks of the inquiry dealt with strategic issues, with issues relating to section 1 of the scheme, which runs from north

of Newbuildings to south of Strabane, dealt with in weeks three and four. Hearings in relation to section 2 of the scheme, which runs from south of Strabane to south of Omagh, are currently being held at the Mellon Country Hotel in Omagh, and the hearings in relation to section 3, which runs from south of Omagh to the land frontier at Aughnacloy, started yesterday in Kelly's Inn, Garvaghy.

It is expected that the independent inspector's report of the public inquiry will be presented to the Department before the end of this year. I will give careful consideration to its recommendations and to the strategic roads programme when the process has been completed and the necessary reports are available.

3.00 pm

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister says that he will give careful consideration to the outcomes of the public inquiry. I would be grateful if he could put a time frame on that, because the inquiry will be beneficial to the people of the entire area. Obviously, there is support from the Irish Government. Will he impose a deadline on his consultation with his Department after the inquiry has reported?

Mr Kennedy: I have not been terribly impressed by the Irish Government's adherence to the deadlines that they have put on things recently, such as the Smithwick tribunal. Although the timings are not date-specific, my expectation is that I will have the report of the public inquiry in the early autumn. I want some time to give careful consideration to that report. It may be possible to outline things in or around October.

Roads: Donaghadee

8. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department is planning to invest in the roads infrastructure in Donaghadee in the 2011-12 financial year. (AQO 171/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has advised that it does not draft its work programmes on a town-by-town basis but by council area. Roads Service is, at present, finalising its budget allocations for individual council areas. Details of the work programmes are presented to the respective councils in the spring of each year and are dependent on the amount of funding available. I know that the Member is still a member of

North Down Borough Council. The report to Ards Borough Council, which includes Donaghadee, can be accessed from the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Internet site and contains the indicative programme of work. Copies of the report can also be obtained by contacting the divisional roads manager for Roads Service's southern division.

Committee Business

Agency Workers Directive

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the EU directive on conditions for temporary agency workers (directive 2008/104/EC); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure, in implementing the directive, that both the needs of workers and minimising the costs to business are taken into account. — [Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Sammy Douglas, so I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech be made without interruption.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the motion. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members must leave the Chamber quietly when a Member is speaking.

Mr Douglas: First, I want to thank the electorate of East Belfast for putting their faith and trust in me to represent them in the House and in other places. I commit myself to working for the whole community of East Belfast. Secondly, I wish to pay tribute to Lord Wallace Browne, who did a sterling job as a Member of the Assembly in the previous mandate.

Earlier today, I mentioned some of the serious difficulties that we had last night. I hope and pray that those things are resolved for us all. Last night, there were gunmen on the streets of east Belfast for the first time in many years, and it is only by the grace and mercy of God that people were not killed. I hope that people stop, take a step back and analyse where we are, because none of us wants to go back to the bad old days.

In the 1970s, I met a young man from the lower Shankill estate in Belfast who had a passion and a vision for ordinary working-class people, and, in particular, low-income families. He became my role model for community regeneration, and I am grateful for his help, direction and support over the years. That young man was Jackie Redpath, who later became the chief executive of the Greater Shankill Partnership. He was the pioneer for early years

education, training and employment schemes and working with local communities. However, he also worked with local businesses. His was a broad approach to community regeneration on the Shankill Road.

I remember that, back in 1978, he sent me to a seminar at Magee College, in the north-west. A man known affectionately as “Paddy Bogside” was taking the seminar. In those days, there were no high-level presentations; it was a matter of using a blackboard and chalk. He talked about community regeneration, the social economy, community enterprise and many other things. He asked us how many Catholics were in the room, and, as I was running out the door — I am only joking — 19 or 20 people put their hands up. He then asked us how many Protestants were there. I was the only person there from the Protestant/unionist community. He wrote on the blackboard, “Where are all the Prods?” He was asking: on community development, community economic development and community regeneration issues, why do no self-help initiatives come out of disadvantaged Protestant areas?

All that set me on a search through which I got involved in a lot of community regeneration projects, where I made cross-community contacts and took part in cross-border co-operation. When I came away from cross-border and cross-community meetings, I was surprised to find that I was still a Protestant, still a unionist, and still a loyalist. I have a lot to thank Jackie Redpath for. He is a real man of vision from the Shankill Road.

Today’s debate on the agency workers directive is about parity with the UK, the 12-week qualification period for rights and ensuring equal treatment for agency workers. Mr Deputy Speaker, do I have five or 10 minutes?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Five.

Mr Douglas: Many of those workers are low-paid, low-skilled and from low-income families.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. He might need an extra minute. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Douglas: I would be happy for the Member to ask me to give way again.

Although we have regional variations across the UK, it is difficult to argue for special treatment for Northern Ireland. The Committee took evidence from the Confederation of British

Industry (CBI), which raised issues about the cost to Northern Ireland companies. We also heard from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), but I was very disappointed because it did not realise that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and CBI in the UK had reached an agreement on the directive.

For me, the directive is about ensuring the rights of low-paid, low-income families. I know some workers who have been in temporary employment for two, three or four years. In fact, I know of some people who have been temporary workers for 20 years. Surely that is not right in today’s society.

I understand that my time is nearly up, so I will jump forward. Mr Deputy Speaker, in my opinion, we need to accept the EU directive. I propose, therefore, that we support the motion.

Mrs Overend: I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate, and I thank my colleague Basil McCrea, the Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning, for tabling the motion. This is what the Assembly is all about: bringing legislation to the Chamber and debating the various issues that are important not only to the people of Northern Ireland but to businesses in Northern Ireland. At this time of economic downturn, it is very important to get that balance correct.

The EU directive raises issues that are important to agency workers. Just the other day, as I was coming out of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I bumped into a guy with whom I had a casual conversation about the directive and what we would be doing today. Talking to him brought home to me how important the directive is. He told me that, although he had worked for an agency for 15 years, it was not by choice; he needed to take the job. He would have benefited from the extra rights that the EU directive will bring. That brings home to us how important those issues are.

Implementing the EU directive in Northern Ireland raises three big issues, the most important of which is the 12-week derogation. We received representation and information from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. In its argument for ensuring that the qualifying period is implemented in Northern Ireland, it said that having the 12-week qualifying period would avoid creating significant bureaucracy. It also said that it is impossible to overestimate the damage that would be done

to the already fragile Northern Ireland labour market if new regulations were implemented without measures to limit the impact on businesses.

Earlier, my colleague Alastair Ross referred to our being powerless in Northern Ireland. However, article 5(4) of the directive makes it clear that the derogation can be utilised by member states only if an agreement to do so can be reached with social partners at a national level.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: Just a wee second, if you do not mind. Article 5(4) goes on to state that such arrangements shall also be made without prejudice to agreements at national or regional level. Suffice it to say that we are certainly not powerless.

Mr Ross: I want to put the record straight: I did not say that we were powerless. I said that it is a European directive, so it is not a matter of whether we implement it; it is how we do so. That was my point.

Mrs Overend: Thank you for your intervention. It certainly is about how we implement it. Thank you for clarifying that.

The EU directive will give additional rights to pregnant women, who will have the right to go to antenatal appointments. Those rights are welcomed, but the Minister needs to consider whether those rights go far enough. Other issues that he needs to investigate further are the six-week period and the definition of “agency worker”.

The big issue for me, coming from Mid Ulster, which is a rural constituency, is that we have a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises. I really want to represent the concerns of those businesses in my constituency. I urge the Minister to make sure that we have a balanced approach in the implantation of the directive. I want to support businesses, especially during this economic downturn. I am reluctant to add a burden to those businesses with the implementation of the directive.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I am a new Member, and it has been a steep learning curve. I have enjoyed the presentations in Committee from various organisations, trade unions, businesses and so

forth. Departmental officials said to us that they have picked up on various issues that had not been raised earlier. Hopefully, the debate will have raised additional issues that the Minister will take on board. I urge him to do so.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing the directive to the House. As he said, it is too important not to debate. I am somewhat conflicted in my support for the directive, but not because of the aim; I have no difficulty with the aim of equal treatment. What gives me pause is whether it is the correct vehicle — the right means to the end — and also the cost of the directive, which, as we heard, could be between £80 million and £166 million over the next 10 years to our private and public sectors, depending on whether the directive takes effect from day one or week 13 of when an individual is engaged by a hirer.

The CBI is quite explicit about the implications. It states:

“Where UK costs prove prohibitive businesses could fail or alternative approaches that are detrimental to the UK job market will be developed.”

We must beware that we are not introducing a directive that makes agency workers less attractive to employers than they are now. We must beware that the admirable goal of the equality agenda does not result in more people being equally unemployed and unemployable because of red tape.

It is not the role of politicians to create jobs. Rather, our role is to create the environment in which businesspeople can create jobs and wealth that will generate the taxes that will fund excellence in our public services. As I said, our role is to create the environment, not the jobs.

During the election campaign, I asked a businessman to name three measures that the Executive could take to help him to grow his business. His initial reaction was that there was nothing that we could do for him, but, on mature reflection, he said that one thing that we could do is to make it easier for him to get rid of unproductive employees. He is not a man who is out to exploit his workforce but someone who would rather see a fair day’s work in return for a fair day’s wage and some manner of redress when he does not get that balance from his employees. Therefore, we should beware and reflect on the wisdom of introducing more

red tape at a time when the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce estimates that red tape has cost local business £2.4 billion since 1998.

3.15 pm

I speak with the experience of having previously employed temporary workers when I ran a public relations company. We specialised in event management, which meant that, depending on the event, we had a short-term need for particular specialisms and expertise that were of no use to us for the rest of the year. We operated a flat fee arrangement, which was good for us and good for the contractors and was done without reference to the terms and conditions of my full-time staff.

I speak also as a former freelance journalist who was employed by BBC sport at weekends to cover games of association football, rugby union or Gaelic football. Some of my associates had spent over 20 years in that arrangement, working for a flat fee, and were more than happy that that was the only recompense that they got. I note that Ms Gildernew spoke about agency and temporary workers, and I also note that the directive contains no agreed definition of “agency worker”. The Minister needs to clarify that.

As the legislation is an EU directive, I understand that we have relatively little wriggle room. Mr McIlveen made that point earlier. However, I fear that this will be another squeeze on the application of common sense. It seems to me that the more we legislate, the further common sense is squeezed from the agenda. Indeed, if the earth were flat, common sense would be hanging on to the rim by its fingertips. We should do what we can to ensure that the directive does not loosen the grip of common sense any further, and we should ensure that, as far as possible, the directive continues to allow businesspeople to apply local solutions to local issues. I support the motion.

Mr Allister: There is something essentially academic about the debate, because the fundamental reality, unpalatable as it is to me, is that this is a piece of EU legislation. In consequence of the very substantial surrender by member states to the EU of the rights to control much of their own social policy and employment policy, Brussels now has the capacity to decree what we should think, do and implement in respect of our own particular employment laws and needs. That is not a healthy situation, and it curtails and stymies the

rights of an Assembly such as this to adjust its policies to meet its specific local needs.

Therefore, we are faced with the agency workers directive, which decrees what we shall and must do. All that is left to us is the mechanism of implementation, and that is within very confined and constrained circumstances. Therefore, it follows that there is much about this debate that, as I said, is academic.

Of course, it comes also in the context that the hand of Europe upon the control of our business and our employment laws has been a tremendously expensive operation. A total of £74 billion since 1998 has been the cost of implementing in the United Kingdom EU regulations pertaining to employment matters. This is but the latest dead hand that has been delivered upon us. Therefore, all we can do, and what we most certainly should do, is seek to diminish and restrain the impact and to do the minimum that is required, bearing in mind the very substantial burden that it places on business.

We are often told that the future economy and prosperity of Northern Ireland relies upon building our small and medium-sized businesses, and we all repeat the platitudes about that. However, as legislators, we are taking steps, whether by compulsion or otherwise, that, if we take the 12-week option, according to the Department, will burden our industry to the tune of £26 million a year. Yet we tell ourselves that we are in the business of flexible working arrangements, building our economy —

Mr B McCrea: Since we are having a debate, I want to ask the Member a question. Does he think that it is right that someone who has worked for an agency for 15 years alongside another person who has been employed does not have the same rights and can be dismissed without any compensation or any other legal rights? Is that an appropriate way to behave?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: It is not right that, where a person continues, as they do under the agency workers directive, to be essentially an agency worker employed by an agency, the employer who takes them on to work in his business has all the obligations put upon him. It is a fact that there are still basic threshold periods in employment

law. For unfair dismissal, it is 12 months. It is a basic criterion of employment law that there are thresholds, and it is right, therefore, that this directive has the scope for a qualifying threshold.

In this case, I say that we do not have any option, because article 5 of the directive decrees that, where there is a national agreement, that sets the parameters. In this case, there is a national agreement between the two sides of industry in the UK, which sets the introductory period as 12 weeks. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, it is chasing a rainbow for others to say that we need to give this immediate implementation. I believe that it cannot be done and that, if it could be done, it should not be done, because it would add excessively to the burden upon industry and create a patchwork of rights across the United Kingdom. If we want to be an effective and functioning part of the sixth biggest economy in the world, rather than an appendage to the basket case that is the economy of the Irish Republic, we need to have —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: — not a patchwork of rights but a uniformity of rights. For those reasons, I take the de minimis approach to this directive.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I thank the Employment and Learning Committee for putting down this balanced motion, which I fully support. I entirely appreciate why the Committee saw the need for wider debate on the draft agency workers regulations. The underlying issue goes to the very heart of employment law, and we need to find a difficult balance between employment rights and the burden that those rights can place on business.

The scale and importance of the proposals in the agency workers directive are significant and fully merit the considered and balanced debate that has just taken place. I want to thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I fully acknowledge, as some Members argued, that the transposition of the directive will have a considerable impact on local business and that there is a need to minimise the inherited costs without compromising the rights of agency workers. However, I also recognise the equally cogent arguments made by other Members that these proposals are designed to provide greater protection for agency workers and that there is

an opportunity to go beyond what is proposed in the rest of the United Kingdom. Having heard the strength of the debate, I am sure that the people most affected will be assured that the Assembly is committed to the directive's transposition in a way that is fair to agency workers and companies.

I assure Members that the final proposals that I will take to the Executive will be informed by the two guiding principles established in the Employment and Learning Committee's motion. Members will be aware that the directive sets out the principle of equal treatment as follows:

"The basic working and employment conditions of temporary agency workers shall be, for the duration of their assignment ... at least those that would apply if they had been recruited directly ... to occupy the same job."

The directive was the culmination of a long history of lobbying for better protections for temporary agency workers for whom there were no robust deterrents to abuse and mistreatment by those few rogue agencies that engaged in such unacceptable practices. If an agency worker is doing the same work as a permanent employee in the same workplace, there can be little justification for that agency worker to receive inferior basic working and employment conditions. I am confident that the proposed transposition of the directive will address those long-standing inequalities in a measured way and ensure that agency workers receive the same basic entitlements as their permanent colleagues. In addition, I am convinced that the proposals will maintain the flexibility that characterises agency work and which is so critical to ensuring that that the Northern Ireland economy remains competitive.

The directive's default position is that equal treatment should apply from day one of an assignment. However, the directive allows member states some flexibility in how they apply that principle. That flexibility includes the establishment of a qualifying period before the right to equal treatment arises, provided that such an agreement is by social partners at a national level. Such an agreement was reached by the CBI and TUC in May 2008, with the support of the previous UK Government, and I have received legal advice that that agreement does, indeed, apply to Northern Ireland.

I fully appreciate the concerns of the local trade union movement, as represented by

the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The Northern Ireland Committee has made strong representations to the Department and to the Employment and Learning Committee, arguing that the social partner agreement should have been between the regional partners.

I fully understand the points that were made by the trade unions and I put it on record that I recognise the key role that the Northern Ireland Committee plays in representing workers in Northern Ireland. I also reassure Members that my Department will continue to engage with the Northern Ireland Committee on the implementation of the directive and all other policy developments which impact on the rights of workers. However, be clear: we do not have the option of a regional agreement. The directive is clear that that can be only on the basis of a national agreement, so, in that respect, our hands are tied. The legal advice that I received sets that principle out clearly. In that context, the only possible agreement is between the national social partners, which, in a UK context are the CBI and the Trades Union Congress.

Mr McElduff: Does the Minister accept that, in the North, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has the remit to represent the union view? Does he further accept that the TUC has not been imbued with that authority since 1893? That issue was raised in Committee by the unions, and I feel that it has not been answered.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to Mr McElduff for his intervention, and I will not disagree with what he said. However, equally, we must be clear that, irrespective of particular historical arrangements that have arisen in relation to Northern Ireland and Ireland, the terms of the European directive are clear: we can derogate only on the basis of a national agreement. This may well be the —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Farry: Yes, I will give way to the Committee Chair.

3.30 pm

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. Obviously, I accept the timescale that he has to work within. However, the argument that was put to the Committee, and which was raised by my colleague Sandra Overend, is that article 5(4) of the directive makes it clear that the derogation can be utilised by member states

only if an agreement to do so can be reached with social partners at a national level. However, it goes on to state:

“Such arrangements shall also be without prejudice to agreements at national, regional, local or sectoral level that are no less favourable to workers.”

My reading is that there is some room for manoeuvre. That said, it may be that time is against us and we may not be able to do that. However, I ask the Minister to reflect on that when he considers his position.

Dr Farry: It is fair to say that we have some room for manoeuvre on the precise way in which the directive is put into effect in Northern Ireland. It is important to draw a distinction between that point and being clear that the derogation on the 12-week commencement period can be taken forward only at a national level. The Department has taken legal advice on that point, and the advice is incredibly clear and unambiguous.

Ms Gildernew: I support the position of colleagues from the Committee for Employment and Learning on that point: we need to see some flexibility for our particular circumstances. Although the 12-week period has been discussed, I am concerned that there are other issues, such as outstanding maternity entitlements where, again, the Minister has the capacity to add flexibility. It would be interesting to hear the legal opinion that the Minister sought. As colleagues in the House know, there is always more than one legal opinion. Has that pointed to any other flexibility that we could apply here?

Dr Farry: Those comments reflect the opportunity for us to do things differently locally as regards the precise detail and balance. Again, I repeat the point on the derogation regarding commencement: the legal opinion is incredibly clear that that can be taken forward only on the basis of a national agreement between the social partners. We are perhaps in danger of talking about two slightly different concepts of where we have room for manoeuvre. I will come to the point about maternity issues in a moment.

Another point worth stressing is that this episode points out the need for devolved Administrations, in particular our own, given where we are today, to be more actively involved

in the process of drawing up directives in Brussels. That points to the need for a strong representation in Brussels by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly so that we can add our input to the policymaking process at a much earlier stage when there is much more room for debate, rather than at the eleventh hour, where we stand today. I am more than happy, via my Department, to write to my UK counterparts to stress those points and the need for Northern Ireland to be involved much earlier in the process.

Mr McLaughlin: I want to ask a question while you are dealing with the issue of application and interpretation. Much has been made of the strength of the public sector. Staff in the public sector have developed very significant protections, entitlements and benefits over a long time. However, it is not normally recognised that there is a significant cohort of agency workers working alongside them who have very different working conditions. Would it be helpful if the Minister were to consider that with regard to interpretation and legal advice? In this place, for example, a significant cohort of agency workers is working in entirely different circumstances to those of their colleagues, and we should attempt to address that anomaly.

Dr Farry: I will certainly listen to all the comments that have been made today. The final paper that goes to the Executive will reflect all of that. The general policy will capture all those situations across Northern Ireland. Of course, the policies on the employment of agency workers, whether in the public or private sector, are for those bodies to decide, rather than my Department. No doubt, the Assembly Commission will have listened to the Member's comments.

I am conscious of the need to progress through this very substantive issue.

The derogation would mean that there would be a 12-week qualification period in any job before equal treatment would apply. The 12-week period was arrived at to establish a compromise between the interests of agency workers and those of industry. The Department carried out a preliminary regulatory impact assessment of the directive's proposals based on the 12-week derogation. The impact assessment identified annual costs for private sector and public sector employers of up to £27 million and £6.5 million respectively. The main annual benefits of up to

£19.2 million and £6.4 million will fall to the agency workers most affected and Her Majesty's Treasury respectively.

The 12-week qualification period represents an almost 60% saving on the costs of implementation compared with equal treatment being applied from day one. Therefore, although the proposed legislation will undoubtedly place sizeable burdens on business in Northern Ireland, the 12-week qualification period significantly reduces the burden on business.

I want to restate the commitment of the Executive to rebalancing and growing the Northern Ireland economy. That requires us to take steps to develop a dynamic, flexible workforce that can respond quickly to new job opportunities and inward investment.

The role of agency workers in Northern Ireland ensures that companies can respond quickly and effectively to market demands. That cannot be underestimated. In that context, I firmly believe that any attempt to implement the directive on a day-one basis will only threaten those critical economic goals. Instead, the application of the qualification period is key to transposing the directive to minimise the burden on business while meeting the directive's equal treatment commitments for agency workers. It is critical that we strike a balance in that regard.

The Great Britain agency workers regulations have already been laid before Parliament and are due to come into effect in October of this year. The Republic of Ireland, as I understand it, does not yet have full agreement on how to proceed with the implementation of the directive.

Many businesses and employers in Northern Ireland will have interests in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Although it would have been of benefit to benchmark our proposals against the UK's and the Republic of Ireland's approach, I am sure that Members will recognise the urgency of proceeding with a transposition of the directive in order to meet the December 2011 deadline. As Members will be aware, failure to transpose the directive before the deadline could leave my Department open to costly and embarrassing infraction proceedings. The Department had a consultation between December 2010 and March 2011, and I am grateful to the 18 organisations that took part, many of which provided substantive responses.

Mr Douglas: When the Committee was going through its deliberations, the figures presented to it were from the wider GB. Does the Minister agree that we were disarmed in many ways, because even if we wanted a regional variation we did not have the Northern Ireland figures? As a member of that Committee, I am saying that we need that information before we can make a major recommendation.

Dr Farry: The figures and information are available. It is important to stress that the Department's policy is robust and has been backed up by independent research that it commissioned. That fed through to the regulatory impact assessment. There would be no difficulty in providing that information again to the Committee for further consideration.

I do not intend to describe in detail all the proposals. However, I want to focus on some of the key issues that arose during the consultation, critical issues raised by the Committee and some of the points that were raised today. The proposed regulations set out the scope of the proposals and, specifically, which workers and agencies are affected and which are not, including the definition of an agency worker. Recently, concerns were expressed by some consultees and Members that the proposed definition is not sufficiently robust to protect agency workers fully. That is especially so in recent case law. I have considered the matter and taken further legal advice. In light of that, I propose to make a minor but important amendment to the definition of an agency worker to ensure that agency workers can avail themselves of the directive's intended additional rights and protections.

In line with other requirements of the directive, the definition of an agency worker in any related case law will continue to be reviewed. I trust that that will satisfy Members. I am sympathetic to the real concerns expressed on that point, and I am committed to keeping the matter under review.

It is also proposed that the equal treatment will apply in respect of the duration of working time and paid holiday entitlement. That means that agency workers who remain in a given job after a 12-week qualification period will have the same entitlements to rest time and leave as permanent employees. That will be the case even if those entitlements are

more generous than the statutory minimum requirements and also provides for payment in lieu of entitlement for untaken holidays over the statutory minimums. That proposal prompted considerable commentary during the consultation, because certain respondents felt that enhanced holiday entitlements as well as the entitlement to public and bank holidays went above and beyond what was intended in the directive.

Another key issue is the definition of pay. That is an issue that is, unfortunately, open to interpretation and, therefore, argument, as no definition was provided in the directive. The Department did not consider that basic pay alone would satisfy the equal treatment requirement. Therefore, in addition to basic pay, it has been proposed that pay should include holiday pay, payment of overtime, shift allowances, unsocial hours premiums and certain bonuses. However, and again in the interest of balance, we consider that only those bonuses that could be seen as directly attributable to the amount or quality of work done by the agency worker should be included.

We also considered that certain aspects of contractual remuneration are in place to reward the long-term nature of an employer's relationship with the employee. In that light, we came to the view that those should not be included in the definition. As a consequence, we propose to exclude financial participation schemes; occupational pensions; sick pay; pay-related rights; benefits in kind such as company cars, care allowances or health insurance; and maternity, paternity and adoption pay.

For understandable reasons, agencies and employers raised concerns about the inclusion of bonuses and their cost implications, as well as the administrative burden of calculating bonuses for temporary workers. On the other hand, some of our consultees, as well as certain Members who spoke today, felt that the definition of pay did not go far enough and should include maternity pay, pensions and expenses. I firmly believe that it would be impossible to exclude all bonuses from the definition of pay and still be confident of having properly transposed the directive. What has been proposed, therefore, is a compromise, as long-term bonuses have been excluded. Were all bonuses to be excluded, it is likely that we would receive a very strong challenge from the outset.

As we have heard today, a range of views has been expressed as to how the directive should be implemented. I see it as my role, therefore, to try to establish a pragmatic and sensible accommodation of the different perspectives, and I am content that the regulations should include only those bonuses that are directly related to work done or individual performance.

We sought views on a range of other proposals, including the criteria for establishing what constitutes a new qualifying period and a new assignment; anti-avoidance measures for regulations; what the key factors should be for establishing equal treatment; liability for compliance with obligations if things go wrong; as well as measures to deal with dispute regulation. A number of other proposals in respect of provisions intended to apply from day one of an assignment, such as access to employment vacancies and collective facilities at a hirer's premises, were also raised in the public consultation.

The proposed regulations make particular provision for the protection of pregnant women and new mothers, especially in regard to securing their health and safety at work, rights to attend antenatal appointments and the right to adjustments to be made of an offer of alternative work if risks have been identified on assignment.

We have also asked for reviews on proposed thresholds for bodies representing agency workers and provision of information on the use of agency workers to workers' representatives. Finally, we have consulted on the approach to take regarding the flexibility available under the directive that is known as the Swedish derogation. That derogation permits alternative arrangements for agency workers on permanent contracts of employment. Such workers are paid between assignments.

On the issue of maternity, I am still looking at whether we can allow for antenatal appointments from day one of a placement, rather than that kicking in at week 12. I certainly have listened very carefully and closely to those arguments.

My time is up, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I shall leave it there. Thank you very much.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): It is clear from the debate we have heard that there

was value in bringing the issue to the House. The debate has provided all Members, not just members of the Committee for Employment and Learning, with an opportunity to understand the potential impact of this EU directive on employers and agency workers.

The European Union has handed down the directive for transposition into the legislation of member states, and the Department is seeking to comply with a statutory duty to do so. It is the role of the Committee to scrutinise this legislation and to ensure that this is not a country where agency workers can be exploited or subjected to conditions that are prejudicial to their health and safety.

Equally, the Committee is mindful of imposing an additional burden on businesses at a time of real economic hardship. The Department has set out the projected costs of the two alternatives for the qualifying period, either from day one or after 12 weeks. Those alternatives will need to be carefully evaluated. There also appear to be a number of essential legal issues, such as the very definition of an agency worker and the definition of pay, which remain to be resolved. I expect the Minister to keep the Committee informed of the outcome of his review on those issues.

3.45 pm

I will refer briefly to some Members' contributions. The Committee Chairman mentioned problems with pregnant workers; for example, when an assignment is withdrawn when an employer learns that someone is pregnant. Obviously, it is an issue of concern, and the Minister touched on it during his speech. The Chairperson also mentioned the unfair situation of temporary agency workers doing the same job as permanent staff for up to 15 years but on lesser terms. That issue was raised by quite a lot of Members. He said that he was aware of the challenge to employers in that area, but there was a need for balance between the needs of workers and the needs of employers. That is another issue of concern. He also mentioned the lack of information on exactly how many workers are involved. There is little information on the number of agency workers in Northern Ireland, which is an issue that quite a lot of Members raised. Members also raised the short timescale for Committee scrutiny of the directive.

Alastair Ross said that there was no choice about whether we implement the directive. He said that it was a matter of how we implement it, not if we implement it. We have the directive before us, and it is something that we have to implement. He also said that there was a need for balance between business costs and workers' rights, and he mentioned the lack of union involvement in Northern Ireland. He said that the directive should not be implemented differently in Northern Ireland from the UK, and he asked the Minister to spell out the legal position on that. He said that he was not opposed to regional variation, but Northern Ireland businesses would be placed at a disadvantage. He said that the focus should be on job creation rather than adding another burden of cost and administration for businesses. That is one of the key factors in this debate.

Barry McElduff said that the Assembly should now take the lead to ensure equality on the directive, and he used the example of a Law Centre case, referring to the vulnerability of agency workers. He mentioned the union view that agency workers are often the low-skilled, second-class citizens of the employment world, and he said that there is a case for a reduction in the derogation period from 12 weeks to six weeks. He also identified the information gap on the number of agency workers in Northern Ireland and said that the agreement between the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the trade union side (TUS) was not valid because there was no input from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Pat Ramsey asked the Minister to investigate the concerns regarding the inclusion of ICTU. He mentioned that the 12-week gap period allowed unscrupulous employers to opt out of provision of benefits. He asked what anti-avoidance mechanisms are to be put in place. He said that a more robust inspection programme is needed. I agree fully with the Member that there needs to be a much more robust inspection programme for employment agencies with regard to workers. He preferred the day-one approach to the 12-week derogation. Of course, Pat wants to see provisions brought in on day one rather than after 12 weeks. He was concerned that pregnant women should be moved to more suitable employment if it were at all available.

Chris Lyttle mentioned the time pressures to complete the transposition. He thanked the witnesses who briefed the Committee at short notice. He expressed wider concerns about the social framework. He discussed the wider issue of disproportionate representation among agency workers of long-term workers, ethnic minorities and women, which is worse in the UK than in Europe.

David McIlveen said that the Assembly is powerless because the directive is coming from Europe. Of course, that was challenged by Barry McElduff. Mr McIlveen expressed his concern that the Minister should raise those issues with his UK counterpart. He said that the introduction of the legislation does not send out a consistent message to businesses and that it will add to costs and bureaucracy. He said that although unions have disputed the additional burden, his constituency contacts have quoted substantial costs. He said that businesses in his area had contacted him about the additional costs that would be required to implement the directive. I think that he said that it would cost one business in his area £300,000 to implement it. We have to take that into account when we consider the directive. Mr McIlveen said that the timing of the legislation is difficult. He said that flexibility in recruitment is essential for the survival of businesses. He also said that there is a need to protect the interests of permanent staff who have undergone rigorous recruitment processes.

Michelle Gildernew highlighted the lack of agreement with unions. She quoted the TUC report that states that a large number of agency staff would prefer to have permanent employment. She was concerned that enhanced maternity pay and leave are not included in the directive and that temporary agency work may be the only work available to unemployed skilled workers. However, she did not mention the burden that that would have on businesses and its potential to put some small businesses to the wall through loss of employees simply because they cannot meet the extra financial burden that the directive may well place upon them. That is one issue that she failed to take into consideration during her deliberations.

Other Members, such as Sammy Douglas, said that the directive was about ensuring the rights of low-paid temporary staff. He spoke from personal experience in his constituency. Sandra Overend spoke of the value of bringing those

issues to the Assembly for further debate. She mentioned that working for an agency is not a positive choice. She said that recruitment agencies spelled out negative impact on businesses here. She challenged the view that Northern Ireland was powerless, saying that it was capable of implementing the directive in its own way.

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

Mr Buchanan: I have not got through other Members' remarks. As the consultation period on the directive comes to a close, the Committee calls for the Minister to take account of concerns that have been raised in the debate and to ensure that the legislation that he brings back to the Committee in due course reflects both workers' needs and businesses' costs in a fair and equitable way.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the EU directive on conditions for temporary agency workers (directive 2008/104/EC); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure, in implementing the directive, that both the needs of workers and minimising the costs to business are taken into account.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease while there is a change in the Chair.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Colin Worton

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we begin, I caution the House that there are serious issues associated with this matter. Members should, therefore, exercise responsibility when making their contributions today. I remind Members that the proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. The Minister of Justice will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Elliott: Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome your caution on the matter. There are obviously very serious issues involved, and I accept and appreciate that. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue today, and I hope that the House will give it the significance that it deserves. I will not speak for very long, because I want to hear from other Members about where they are coming from on the issue. In particular, I look forward to the comments of my party colleague Danny Kennedy. He has been working on the matter for quite a lot of years and obviously has the inside knowledge that many others do not.

I feel that it is important to lay the context for this debate. As I understand, Colin Worton was arrested on Thursday 1 December 1983 at 6.00 am and was taken to Castlereagh police station under suspicion of being involved in the murder of Adrian Carroll three weeks before that in Armagh. He was interviewed no fewer than 23 times and vigorously denied any complicity in the murder. However, during the twenty-fourth interview on the evening of 5 December, it is alleged that Mr Worton made a rather bizarre and surprising statement to police during which he confessed to having prior knowledge of the attack, to taking part in the mock arrest of Neil Latimer in Lonsdale Street and to subsequently travelling with him in the same Land Rover before seeing the gun being handed over.

It is not for the House to rule on the admissibility or inadmissibility of evidence that dates back almost 30 years. However, I feel that it is important just to note the words of

Mr Smyth QC when he commented that the statement:

“had been induced by the detectives at Castlereagh by a trick which embraced threats and dishonest promises and oppressive and unfair means.”

That point is crucial.

The sole evidence against Mr Worton on the charge of murder was the verbal and written confessions said to have been made by him to detectives at Castlereagh holding centre on 5 December 1983. However, Mr Worton has since claimed that the police informed him that he faced up to 20 years in jail unless he made a confession. He also claims that he was told that, if he admitted a role in events surrounding the murder, he would serve only five years.

Taking a step back from the interview during which it was claimed that a confession was made, it is clear that Mr Worton was under some immense emotional and psychological strain in the initial period of his detention. He refused food on 1 and 2 December. He then took a short reprieve, and subsequently went on a milk-only diet until lunch on 6 December, before reverting to his fast until the evening of 7 December.

Therefore, we must wonder what his mental state was on the evening of 5 December, when he was alleged to have made that confession. Mr Worton remained on remand for 30 months, until May 1986, when he was eventually released due to the inadmissibility of his evidence.

4.00 pm

This case is about much more than financial compensation. Colin Worton spent 30 months of his life in custody awaiting a trial that never happened. The prosecution case against him relied entirely on a single piece of verbal evidence, which was crudely rejected on the grounds of inadmissibility.

Until April 2006, an ex gratia scheme was operated by successive Home Secretaries and Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland for the payment of compensation to people who had been wrongly convicted but whose cases did not fall within section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Although the scheme has now been discontinued, it is accepted that individuals such as Colin Worton who applied before April 2006 continue to be entitled to compensation if

they meet the requirements of the scheme. It is the opinion of the Ulster Unionist Party that Mr Worton deserves compensation similar to that which was awarded to Noel Bell, James Hagen, Winston Allen and many others who found themselves in similar situations. There is no doubt about the inadmissibility of the evidence against them, and there is no doubt about the inadmissibility of the evidence that supposedly implicated Mr Worton.

Mr Worton did not get so much as an apology, and he certainly did not get any compensation, financial or otherwise, for the years that he spent behind bars. Therefore, I urge the House, its Members, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Minister of Justice and the Secretary of State to take on board this case. I further urge them to review the situation that Mr Worton found himself in and to look at the possibility of offering him an apology and compensation.

Mr Irwin: I very much welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I thank my colleagues for securing this adjournment debate. I attended an event in Bessbrook this morning with my colleague Jeffrey Donaldson MP. It was organised by the Kingsmills families, who gave their response to the Historical Enquires Team (HET) report on the massacre of 10 Protestant workmen. Colin's brother was cruelly murdered in that attack, and it has been a difficult and long day for him and his family. We recognise that and commend him for making the trip to Stormont today.

At the outset, I must state that Mr Worton has conducted one of the most rigorous and dignified campaigns to exonerate himself. Having met him on numerous occasions, I know that one cannot be left in any doubt as to his genuineness and utmost respectability. We in the Chamber fully recognise that Colin was acquitted and was not convicted of the murder of Adrian Carroll. We also recognise the difference between his situation and that of other individuals directly related to the case who were convicted and subsequently had their convictions quashed. In light of that, I fully support Mr Worton in his assertion that, given the stigma that is attached to the case and despite his acquittal and absolute innocence, the whole ordeal has had a detrimental effect on him and his family.

It must be remembered that Colin spent almost three years on remand and had a particularly

difficult time in the legal system. He was extremely vulnerable at that stage of his life, and the entire ordeal greatly upset him and his family. As a result of the case, Mr Worton lost his job with the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), and he believes that it prevented him from pursuing a full career with the Army and hindered many other employment opportunities throughout his life. I share the view that his co-accused, who later had their convictions quashed and were fairly compensated, were more clearly and unambiguously exonerated than he was.

Colin is firmly of the view that there were serious issues with the manner in which his interviews were conducted and believes that there was a serious default. In countless communications from various Secretaries of State and other members of the British Government, it is concluded that Colin does not meet the criteria for either the statutory compensation scheme or the ex gratia scheme, as he was not convicted but acquitted. However, under established ex gratia arrangements, compensation can be awarded in exceptional circumstances, including a situation in which the detention was the result of serious default on the part of the police or any other public body. Colin firmly believes that to have been the case. I must state that, although Colin's fight is not one in which compensation is the ultimate goal, the treatment of his co-accused, following the quashing of their convictions, is in stark contrast to Colin's post-acquittal treatment.

Colin has suffered tremendously since this ordeal. I welcome the fact that our own Justice Minister, Mr Ford, is present and is giving the case a fair wind. I urge him to look into this matter in the utmost detail for Mr Worton's sake and do all he can to address the obvious injustices visited against Mr Worton, which Mr Worton feels strongly aggrieved by.

In a recent meeting, Mr Ford, the Justice Minister, stated that he would be willing to make a statement to the House which would go some way to further highlighting Colin's innocence and non-involvement in the murder of Adrian Carroll. I trust that that will be the case today, as such a statement will be warmly welcomed by Colin.

I also urge the Minister to pursue the ex gratia issue in his Department and further investigate any avenue that may be open to Mr Worton for some financial recognition of his situation,

given the circumstances. I understand, from corresponding with the Historical Enquiries Team, that it is looking into the murder of Adrian Carroll within its investigative remit.

Given the timely nature of this debate, my thoughts are with the family of Mr Carroll at this time.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Adrian Carroll was murdered in Armagh as he made his way home from work on 8 November 1983. He was shot three times in the head and neck by a lone gunman. The Carroll family had already suffered the loss of a son through murder. Adrian Carroll's murder is being investigated by the Historical Enquiries Team, and I sincerely hope that that investigation will bring justice for the Carroll family. I know from speaking to him that Colin Worton wants that family to have justice in the same way that he seeks justice and has done for the past 27 years.

Five members of the UDR, including Colin Worton, were subsequently arrested and charged with Mr Carroll's murder. The four others were convicted but three had their convictions quashed and were compensated for their time in custody. However, the fourth, Neil Latimer, had his conviction upheld and served 14 years in prison before being released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Latimer unsuccessfully appealed against his conviction on two further occasions, the last being in 2004. That is the general background to the case.

Colin Worton was acquitted of the murder of Adrian Carroll on the basis that the only evidence against him was a statement made by him in Castlereagh police station. That statement was deemed inadmissible by the trial judge and Mr Worton was acquitted. Mr Worton set out thereafter to fight for justice for himself and, in the interim, he has been supported by the leaders of the four main Churches here, the British Irish Rights Watch, the victims' commissioners in Northern Ireland, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, as well as by the majority of political leaders and public representatives from across the political divide in Northern Ireland.

Anyone who has met Colin Worton cannot help but be impressed by his honesty and desire for justice. He certainly impressed me, and that

is why I am prepared to stand here and speak in support of his attempts to find justice. He has asserted his innocence constantly over the 27 years of his campaign, and he maintains that his incriminating statement to police in Castlereagh was the result of his vulnerability and the constant pressure exerted on him over days of intense questioning. Police found the areas of vulnerability in Mr Worton, namely his family and his girlfriend, and applied pressure to exploit them. The fact that the resulting statement was deemed inadmissible by the trial judge is, I believe, a strong indication of serious police default in the manner in which they obtained that statement.

Mr Worton believes that, despite the dismissal of the case against him and the fact that he was never convicted of murder, he has been treated unfairly compared with those who were convicted of murder and later had their convictions overturned. His claim for compensation has been rejected, and he has never received any apology for what happened to him during that period.

A judicial review of the case in February 2010 failed. It rejected the view of serious police default in obtaining the statement from Mr Worton. Indeed, the methodology employed by the police in Castlereagh was not unusual at the time. Police often used a similar approach to obtain statements. A similar approach was used in the case of a constituent of mine, Lawrence O'Keeffe from Newry, to obtain a statement that led to his conviction for the mortar bombing of Newry police station and a five-year prison sentence. Mr O'Keeffe, like Mr Worton, is fighting for justice, and I am happy to support them both.

Mr Worton's case does not meet the criteria of either of the two compensation schemes, and he has been left in limbo to fight for justice over a long number of years. However, Mr Worton has constantly emphasised the fact that his fight is not fundamentally about compensation; it is about his exoneration and the clearing of his name. That has been his main aim.

Mr Wells: Does the honourable Member agree that it would be impossible to put a monetary value on the loss that Mr Worton has suffered over the past 27 years and that no amount of compensation could ever recompense him, but that a very public payment, no matter what it is, would be a clear indication that the security

forces treated him extremely badly all those years ago?

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I agree with him. Mr Worton's life has been blighted by the experiences that he endured, and, as Mr Wells said, no amount of money could buy back what he lost or compensate him for what he suffered.

A mechanism is needed for the review of cases such as that of Mr Worton. I appeal to the Minister of Justice, whom I welcome here today, and to the Secretary of State to review in detail Colin Worton's case, with a view to his full exoneration and adequate compensation for his suffering, loss of career opportunity and disruption of family life through the years.

I express my admiration for the way in which Mr Worton has carried out his campaign for justice through the years. Many a lesser person would have given up by now, but it is an indication of Mr Worton's belief in his case that he has continued to this day.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr D Bradley: I hope that his campaign soon comes to an end and that it does so having met with success.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

4.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak from the Back Benches on this important issue. I thank my party leader, Tom Elliott, for tabling this topic for discussion and consideration by the Assembly. I also thank the other Members who contributed. I was impressed by the previous contribution from Mr Bradley. I note the non-attendance of Sinn Féin Members. However, if they are not present, they are not speaking against the debate, which, in itself, may be of some significance.

The 21 June is the longest day, and it has been a very long day. It has been a very long day for a number of reasons. As my honourable friend Mr Irwin said, the HET inquiry report on the Kingsmills massacre was discussed and effectively launched for public consideration earlier today in Bessbrook. That has been a difficult report not only to read but to come to terms with. The connection with Colin Worton is that his brother Kenneth was a victim in the Kingsmills massacre.

So, it has been a very long campaign for Colin Worton not only with regard to Kingsmills but for justice for himself. He has doggedly pursued, lobbied for and raised his case and refused to go away. He has brought his case to the attention of many individuals, elected representatives and campaign groups, and it is right that it is aired today in the Assembly. I pay tribute again to his persistence and welcome him here today with other members of his family, including, on a day such as today, his mother.

I do not want to go over the details that we have already heard; they have been well documented. However, it is clear that the only bit of evidence that implicated Colin in the murder of Adrian Carroll was the supposed confession. For the avoidance of doubt, let me place on record my opposition to murder, wherever it comes from. I condemn all murders.

The police acknowledged that during not one of the 23 interviews did Colin Worton ever indicate any culpability or guilt for the murder. So, it is important that we look at the circumstances in which it is alleged that he made his confession. Given that he was sleep-deprived and suffering, no doubt, emotional and mental disarray and compelled by the unjustified line of questioning from several RUC officers, one can only imagine the pressure that was being placed on Colin Worton. The police have formally acknowledged that they may have used somewhat irregular interrogation techniques.

The police were doing, or were attempting to do, a difficult job. In many ways, it was extremely challenging to get the truth from some compulsive liars. Even to this day, there are prominent public representatives who deny any involvement in incidents of the past or even a link with proscribed organisations. Nevertheless, the debate today is about whether a line was crossed during those interviews. There is a big difference between acceptable interview techniques and trickery or improper conduct.

The debate regarding compensation depends on whether there was a serious default on the part of the police in Castlereagh holding centre. Members who are aware of the details of the case will be aware that there has been significant discussion on the alleged will or last testament that was supposedly produced during the interview process and which contained significant passages, allegedly from Colin himself.

However, that claim gives significant credence to Mr Worton's allegation that detectives were telling him that, if he did not make a confession, he would be charged with murder and sent to prison for 15 to 20 years. The Ulster Unionist Party firmly believes that the Secretary of State made an error in law by persistently interpreting previous conclusions as identifying no serious police default.

Colin Worton spent 30 months of his life in custody waiting on a trial that never happened. He was wrongfully charged. There is no doubt about that. The only piece of evidence against him has been entirely discredited, and there is no doubt about that, either. Colin was improperly incarcerated. However, he has not received so much as an apology.

Legal precedents have been set over the past couple of decades in which people have successfully challenged their sentences.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: This has had a devastating impact on the life of Colin Worton. I welcome the presence of the Justice Minister. I hope that, when we hear from him shortly, he will be able to give comfort to Colin Worton and the Worton family. Whoever killed Adrian Carroll, it was not Colin Worton.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Kennedy: This wrong needs to be righted, and we need an apology and subsequent compensation. This is the place to start.

Mr A Maginness: I support Mr Worton in his quest for justice in relation to the very difficult circumstances that he found himself in and the very long period that he was kept in custody awaiting trial and during the course of his trial. That amounted to 30 months, which, incidentally, would amount to a prison sentence of five years. So, effectively, this man served five years in an ordinary prison sentence. As a result, his life was blighted, and he has bravely tried to rebuild his life ever since.

It is important to remember that he was unjustly treated. Now, on top of that injustice, having been acquitted, he is not entitled to claim compensation under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. As a result, he is thrown on to the discretion of the Secretary of State in relation to an ex gratia payment.

It seems extraordinary that a number of Secretaries of State have refused to give compensation on the grounds that there was no serious default on the part of the police. It seems to me, when I examine the remarks of the learned trial judge, that there is an inescapable conclusion that there was default on the part of the police and that, in the circumstances of the trial, this was serious default. That is a matter, I believe, of fact, and I am baffled by the attitude of successive Secretaries of State in relation to this matter.

They may argue that there was a court case in February of last year in which a judicial review of the Secretary of State's decision was brought by Mr Worton and that that judicial review rejected his claim that the Secretary of State had acted unlawfully. If you look at the judgement by the learned judge in that case, Mr Justice Treacy, you see that his evaluation of the case was that, in terms of irrationality, the Secretary of State did not err. In addition, there was no error in the procedure that he applied. However, if we examine the judgement, we can see that it is a fairly narrow one. One is not second-guessing what another judge would do or what a further court might do, but, nonetheless, the judge clearly stated, in fairly narrow legal terms, that the Secretary of State did not err. However, when one applies what I would have thought is a common-sense test to what the Secretary of State actually did when faced with the facts of the trial and the rejection by the learned trial judge of that man's confession statement, the inescapable conclusion reached is that, in fact, the Secretary of State erred.

The House, with its collective strength, should send a very strong message to the current Secretary of State that he should review the case, and review it positively by giving compensation on the basis of an *ex gratia* payment to that man, who, I believe, has been treated very shabbily. I say to the House that we should send out a very strong message today.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I was impressed by the point that he made, which was that Mr Worton was held for 30 months. In real terms, that equates to a prison sentence of five years. A five-year sentence would be given for a very serious crime. Is it not significant that those who were convicted were subsequently released and compensated, yet here is a man for whom eventually the charge was not made to stick, and he is left to get on

with his life, having served — as Mr Maginness rightly said — a period of five years in prison. And there is no compensation for him at all? It has been mentioned on a number of occasions this afternoon that he does not qualify under section 133. Is the legislation adequate to deal with cases such as Mr Worton's? Surely that needs to be looked at.

Mr A Maginness: I can continue, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: I agree that the law should be looked at. Of course, the *ex gratia* payment scheme is supposed to be a safety net to prevent anomalies such as the one that we are faced with today. I will go further, because those who were acquitted were acquitted on the basis that the police had interfered with the way in which they had recorded the statements and that they could well have been pre-written, and so on.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr A Maginness: The electrostatic deposition analysis (ESDA) tests indicated that there was some manipulation or interference. That was proven scientifically, and that certainly —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr A Maginness: — amounts to serious default on the part of the police.

Mr Allister: I have been familiar with the Colin Worton case for many years, as, in a previous role as an MEP, I made representations for him and took issues relating to the case not just to the Secretary of State but to the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe.

When we distil it down — this is the point that I want the Minister to focus on today — at the heart of the Colin Worton case is a gross inequity and injustice. Lord Morrow just referred to it in his intervention. Colin Worton found himself, having served 30 months on remand, acquitted of the offence on direction of the judge, yet those whom the same judge convicted and, in due course, were acquitted on appeal, qualified for compensation and got compensation under the statutory scheme. However, Colin Worton, who was acquitted at first instance because the evidence was utterly discredited, although he equally served

a period of time in prison, has been denied compensation.

Therein lies the basic inequity and injustice that survives to this day.

4.30 pm

Let us never forget that Colin Worton was acquitted by Lord Justice Kelly, who was one of the toughest judges who ever sat on the Bench in this land. He took no prisoners, as it were. He was no soft touch on anything, and he was prepared to convict others, but he faced the reality that, in this case, there was no basis on which to convict. In fact, he directed the acquittal of Colin Worton.

Let me remind the Minister of what Lord Justice Kelly said in that acquittal and direction. He said:

“At the end of the day I am left with the strong conviction that having regard to his make-up, to the situation in which he found himself, to all the circumstances of Castlereagh, to the length and persistence of his questioning ... I should exercise my discretion and exclude as inadmissible his confession ... I go further and say even if this statement was admitted I would have some difficulty in assessing what weight should be given to it having regard to all the circumstances and in particular Worton’s intellectual and emotional make-up. It has been said and I believe it to be appropriate here that the right to the assurance of a fair trial includes the right to be protected from evidence which might have an unreliable effect on the result of the trial.”

It could not be clearer. Lord Justice Kelly was saying that, by virtue of the manner in which Worton, being the person he was, with his capacity, was treated in police custody, no reliance could be placed on anything that was said and that he could not have a fair trial if his statement were admitted. If Lord Justice Kelly reached the conclusion that things were so bad that this man could not even have a fair trial if his statement were admitted, and for that reason directed his acquittal, what possible circumstance could there be to conclude that either there was not serious default on the part of the police in the conduct of that interrogation or that circumstances do not prevail which should entitle him to the ex gratia payment?

I come back to the nub of the matter. As it turned out, it would have been better for Colin Worton to have been convicted and, with those

who were co-accused with him, ultimately acquitted on appeal.

Mr A Maginness: I want to make a point about the co-accused. In a 15 May 2008 reply to my letter to the then Secretary of State, the Minister of State, Mr Paul Goggins MP, said:

“You also believe that the circumstances around the quashing of the convictions of three of Mr Worton’s co-accused in 1992 show that there was serious default in Mr Worton’s case. Serious default was not established against the police in the former cases; even if it had been, I believe it would be wrong to simply assume the same default in Mr Worton’s case.”

Is that not an extraordinary assertion by Mr Goggins about those who had been acquitted on appeal? Surely that also amounted to serious default, which, I believe, also strengthens Mr Worton’s case.

Mr Allister: I think that it is. It points up that we have got ourselves on a roundabout here, where successive Secretaries of State and Ministers of State have got themselves bound into defending a decision that really is indefensible. With the matter now devolved to the local Justice Minister, we have an opportunity to take a fresh look. I will make the point again: it is incredible, and it is the ultimate irony that it would have been better for Colin Worton, in compensation terms, to have been convicted and then had that conviction set aside, than to have been acquitted in the first instance.

That has to be wrong. Something there is so fundamentally offensive to the basic tenets of justice and the compensation process that it cannot be right to construct upon it an edifice that says that there is to be no compensation for Colin Worton because he was acquitted. It is preposterous, and the Minister has to address it. If that requires rewriting the guidelines, then rewrite them, because this inequity cannot be sustained. Whether it takes change to the legislation or to the guidelines on ex gratia payments, change must be made.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Allister: The House should not and cannot tolerate that injustice.

Mrs D Kelly: I support Mr Worton’s bid to clear his name and to be compensated for his time on remand.

Mr Kennedy pointed out the timing of today's debate: we have just had the report of the Historical Enquiries Team into the Kingsmills massacre and the murder of Mr Worton's brother. In the briefing that I have on the history of Colin Worton's case is a 2004 'News Letter' article in which Mr Worton remarked that, coming out of court, Adrian Carroll's brother shook his hand and shook his head at what had happened to him. As I am sure Members will agree, the Carroll family need justice for their brother.

This is a time in which we are struggling to deal adequately with the past and with victims' needs, including miscarriages of justice. In any other democracy, the Kingsmills massacre would be deemed a war crime and those responsible would either have been held or pursued throughout the world and brought to justice for what they did. The families of those who lost loved ones must be remembered. It is telling that part of what drives Mr Worton is the fact that his father did not live to see his son's name cleared. His mother is still alive, so the Justice Minister has an opportunity to allow at least part of Mr Worton's family to gain closure on their sufferings.

I will not delay proceedings, because many of the legal points have been covered by colleagues to my right and left. Nonetheless, this is an auspicious day on which to recount the trials and tribulations of Colin Worton. When one reads his remarks, it is poignant to note that he continues to live in a mental prison because he has yet to break free from the chains of the past. By clearing his name and awarding compensation for his time spent on remand, he might be able to do that.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I thank Tom Elliott for initiating the debate on this important subject, and it would not be improper to associate Tom Elliott with the Back-Bench Member Mr Danny Kennedy for all his work on this case.

I listened with considerable interest to all the points made around the Chamber. Perhaps I should begin by acknowledging that — I am sure that Members would wish me to do so — another important factor at the heart of the discussion about Mr Colin Worton and the UDR four is not in dispute: Adrian Carroll was murdered on 8 November 1983. That is something that his relatives and friends have had to cope with for almost 30 years. The

controversy attached to Colin Worton's case must have made coping more difficult for the Carroll family.

The murder trial took place in May 1986. After exhausting the judicial appeals process, one man, Neil Latimer, remains formally convicted, though released on licence. Three others, Noel Bell, James Hagan and Winston Allen, were also convicted, but, in 1992, their convictions were quashed. In Mr Worton's case, the trial judge had first to decide whether to admit the only evidence presented against him: his confession.

After thorough consideration, with detailed evidence from Mr Worton, the police and expert witnesses, the judge concluded that the confession should not be admitted. Unlike his four co-accused, therefore, Mr Worton was not convicted but acquitted. He was released immediately and returned to service in the Ulster Defence Regiment for the remainder of his contract.

At the beginning of the debate, Tom Elliott outlined Colin Worton's case regarding his treatment and the interrogation process. I must respond to one point, because I think it is crucial. William Irwin said that, in some senses, he believed that the co-accused had been more clearly demonstrated as being innocent because of the way in which they were subsequently treated and the fact that they received compensation. That point was followed up by Lord Morrow. However, I do not believe that that is the case. Mr Allister pointed out that Colin Worton was acquitted at first instance. I shall not go into the discussion about Lord Justice Kelly's demeanour, but the fact is clear: Colin Worton was acquitted at first instance.

I am very conscious that the Historical Enquiries Team has still to report on its review into the investigation of Adrian Carroll's murder.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister take the point that, because Colin Worton was, quite properly, acquitted at first instance, he has in fact been prejudiced in compensation terms because he has fallen between the two stools of the statutory scheme and the ex gratia scheme, and that it is that lacuna that the Minister needs to close?

Mr Ford: I entirely take Mr Allister's point. I was coming to it later. In simple terms, the court, in the first instance, established Mr Colin Worton's innocence. As we have heard, however, he was held in custody for two-and-a-half years awaiting

that trial. It is certainly a case that concerns us this year. It is fundamental that those who are charged with crimes should be held in custody only when necessary, that continuing remand should be periodically tested and reviewed and that they should be brought to trial without undue delay. That is why I am committed to ensuring that we speed up the justice process.

Members have referred to the various representations that have been made. As Dominic Bradley in particular pointed out, representations that are in support of compensation for Mr Worton have been made from very many different sources. As has been said by many, he has conducted his case in an extremely dignified way. However, Members are also aware that, under the previous Administration, several Secretaries of State, on a number of different occasions, concluded that Mr Worton did not meet the criteria for either of the compensation schemes that were then in place. Let me spell them out: the statutory criteria, which are in section 133, required a conviction to have taken place, and the ex gratia scheme was based on the premise of serious default on the part of police or others. That is clearly a point of debate today, and I have listened carefully to the points that have been made as to what exactly that serious default meant in the case of Colin Worton.

Last year, the Secretary of State's decision was upheld by judicial review, although Alban Maginness has given his opinion of the narrowness of that judgement. I met Colin Worton about his application last October. He was accompanied to that meeting by the three Newry and Armagh MLAs who have spoken today.

Mr A Maginness: I am obliged to the Minister for giving way. The judgement of Mr Justice Treacy is fairly narrow in so far as he was dealing primarily with whether there was irrationality in the decision-making of the Secretary of State, or, alternatively or in addition, that the procedures had been properly adhered to. His examination was that those matters had been complied with. He was not, in essence, examining the substance of whether there was serious default on the part of the police. In that sense, it was a narrow judgement. I submit that it was really on the basis of procedure more than anything else.

Mr Ford: I take Mr Maginness's point. Having given way to two barristers, I shall now attempt

to proceed or else, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be hauling me up for time.

When I met Colin Worton last October with the three local MLAs who have spoken — Danny Kennedy, Dominic Bradley and William Irwin — I explained the factors that lay behind the previous decision and explained that I would have to have regard to the same eligibility criteria that would have had to have been considered by previous Secretaries of State. However, I said that I would certainly look at the decision in light of any new material that might emerge.

There is a suggestion that I might simply make a goodwill payment to Mr Worton. However, the legal effect of that would be to establish a completely new compensation scheme. I could not establish a precedent by making a payment to him without serious implications elsewhere.

The position is that I remain open to important new information that might affect the previous decision that Mr Worton is not eligible for compensation and, indeed, that was the statement that was made by Peter Hain as Secretary of State when he closed the ex gratia scheme in 2006. When I met Mr Worton last autumn, the current HET review was getting under way. It may be unlikely that the review would reveal any new information, but, if any such information were to emerge, I would take full account of it in considering Mr Worton's case.

4.45 pm

In addition, I have noted the detailed points that Members made during the debate, and I will take those into account as I ask officials to re-examine the judgement. The case is absolutely still under review, and, in particular, we will need to examine the detailed judgements that have been referred to, initially that of Lord Justice Kelly and then the judicial review of Mr Justice Treacy, to ensure that all factors are taken into account.

At the start of his contribution, Danny Kennedy reminded us all of the significance of today, as it is the day of the publication of the Kingsmill's report from the HET and all that that means for the Worton family in their own loss. Dolores Kelly made a telling contribution when she reminded us all that we have serious issues to deal with as we seek to deal with the past in a collective and inclusive way, not in a piecemeal way. I welcome the sensitivity that has been shown by Members from all of the parties who

have contributed to the debate. I hope that my contribution in response has recognised that sensitivity and sought to see how the process can be moved on constructively.

In concluding the debate, let me make it absolutely clear to Members, to Colin Worton, to all those who support him, to the wider public and to the Worton family circle that there is one clear fact: Colin Worton was found by the proper authorities of the law to be not guilty of any crime associated with the death of Adrian Carroll. As I said in a similar debate in this place, as Justice Minister this year, I bear no responsibility for what happened nearly 30 years ago, but I do have the authority of being Minister of Justice today to repeat that statement: Colin Worton is and always has been completely innocent of any implication in the death of Adrian Carroll. The court made that absolutely clear, and it is my opportunity as Minister to repeat that, so I hope that, although the issue of compensation may still be unresolved, a clear statement to that effect from the Minister of Justice will be some comfort to Colin and his friends.

There is no reason for his character to be stained, and there is no reason why a charge should have been anything other than an erroneous charge that was cleared by the courts at the first instance. I am grateful for the opportunity to make that point. I will continue to examine the information that is there, and I will take full account of all of the constructive contributions made in the Chamber this afternoon.

Adjourned at 4.49 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 27 June 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr P Ramsey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you would be minded to ease the restriction on Members wearing jackets in the Chamber, given that it is very warm in the Building today.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. As the Member will know, I am very strong on dress code in the Chamber. However, I am also very conscious — I know that the Member himself is very strong on dress code in the Chamber, too — that, on occasions, the Chamber can be very warm for a number of reasons. I am fairly relaxed if Members want to take off their jacket, provided that that is not abused.

Matters of the Day

Loughinisland: Police Ombudsman's Report

Mr Speaker: Caitríona Ruane has sought leave to make a statement on the Police Ombudsman's report on the Loughinisland killings, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Ms Ruane to speak for up to three minutes on the subject, and I will then call other Members from the constituency to speak on the matter for up to three minutes. There will be no opportunity for interventions, points of order or a vote on the matter. I will certainly take points of order after the matter is dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ar 18 Meitheamh 1994 nuair a bhí Éire ag imirt i gcoinne na hIodáile i gCorn an Domhain, mharaigh an UVF seisear fear i dteach tábhairne na Heights i Loch an Oileáin. Goineadh cúigear fear. On 18 June 1994, as Ireland was playing Italy in the World Cup, six men — Adrian Rogan, Patsy O'Hare, Dan McCreanor, Malcolm Jenkinson, Eamon Byrne and Barney Green — were killed by the UVF in the Heights Bar in Loughinisland, County Down. Five men were wounded.

The families made a complaint to the Police Ombudsman through their solicitor, Niall Murphy. I met the families, whose courage and determination continue to impress me, for the first time in 2005 at a hotel outside Ballynahinch. During those intervening years, I travelled with them to Brussels and to Westminster and had meetings in Dundalk with Dermot Ahern, ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs, about the massacre. During that time, we also had meetings with the Police Ombudsman, Al Hutchinson, one of the more recent being last

Wednesday — a meeting that lasted 10 hours. We met him again on Friday.

Al Hutchinson promised the families that he would carry out a thorough investigation and leave no stone unturned so that the families would get justice, but they have not got justice. They have been failed at every level by the state. They have been failed by the RUC, the PSNI and, now, by the Police Ombudsman. Despite the fact that the getaway car, the murder weapons, the balaclavas — one containing a hair follicle — gloves and boiler suits were found, no one was ever charged.

The man who planned the murders was an agent. The man who provided the car was an agent. The men who carried out the killings included agents, and the men who completed the getaway and clean-up were British agents. Special Branch was involved at every stage of this mass murder, from planning to execution and cover-up. At every stage in this murder plot, a state agent was central. British state agents murdering citizens is collusion, no matter what Al Hutchinson says.

The senior investigating officer refused to co-operate with the ombudsman's office, and, in a 56-page report by Al Hutchinson, there is not even a mention of Special Branch. The ombudsman's office wrote to the PSNI twice in the past two weeks to request the ballistic history of the weapons. The Chief Constable has refused, despite the fact that they were used in at least three other murders, as confirmed to us by the ombudsman's office and the PSNI. It was also confirmed that the weapons were part of the Brian Nelson shipments. Indeed, the driver of the getaway car is living openly, despite 70 convictions, among them rape, incest —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Ms Ruane: — and drug offences.

This goes right to the top. The driver received the royal prerogative of mercy from Mo Mowlam. Matt Baggott inherited the massacre at Loughinisland. By failing to provide key information and by protecting agents he is now unwittingly —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Ruane: — or wittingly part of the cover-up. The families deserve truth. I support them in their quest for truth.

Mr Wells: Everyone will agree that the massacre in Loughinisland was a dreadful event. Totally innocent people who were simply watching the Republic of Ireland play Italy in the World Cup were gunned down. However, the Member for South Down cannot pick and choose. If she accepts the integrity of Al Hutchinson and that he carried out a rigorous inquiry into that dreadful act, she cannot decide to simply reject his report because it does not meet her prejudged view on the issue.

The reality is that an extensive inquiry was carried out, a report has been issued, and we have to accept the independence and integrity of the person who did it. It is a bit rich for the honourable Member for South Down to demand openness when her party is refusing to co-operate with the Historical Enquiries Team (HET). Indeed, more recently, we heard that one of her party's senior advisers in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Mary McArdle, refused to have anything to do with the HET inquiry into the tragic death of Mary Travers. Therefore, you cannot have it both ways. You have to co-operate with all the inquiries and accept their results.

I accept that the results of this inquiry are not ones with which the relatives are happy. I accept that and the fact that the report has not brought the closure that they seek. However, the reality is that it was a rigorous report carried out professionally and at considerable expense. Sinn Féin will have to accept that, when such reports sometimes do not go the way that it wants, it must accept the findings, whether it likes them or not. Therefore, I am content to accept the bona fides of Al Hutchinson and his team. We need to move on.

I also make the point that we, as a unionist community, are told to move on and to forget atrocities that were aimed at our community. Yet, the Sinn Féin and nationalist side constantly seems to want to dig up such issues time and time again, at great expense to the taxpayer. If it is good enough for us to park and forget issues, it is good enough for Sinn Féin.

Mr McCallister: I say at the outset that it was certainly a dreadful, dreadful event and there was no justification for anything such as that. At that period, Northern Ireland was experiencing a truly horrific year, which included the Shankill bomb, the Greysteel murders and Loughinisland, and that was in the context of our not yet having

reached the first ceasefire. So, it was a truly dreadful time for Northern Ireland. We think, still, of the families of the six men murdered and of those injured at Loughinisland, as well as the families of all those who have suffered during the Troubles.

Turning to the ombudsman's report, I take issue with some of the remarks made by Ms Ruane. There is a report and a process to go through, and you have to agree that you accept that process. It is not the case that the results of that process should tie in or fit with your predetermined outcome. You have to have a process that will work. The Police Ombudsman's office is independent and impartial. It is not there to protect anyone or cover up any evidence. It found no evidence that police informers were protected. That is what the report states, and that is the office that we used, on this occasion, to investigate the matter. Therefore, we have to accept that report. We cannot have a system where we rubbish the report and rubbish and attack the office that provides that report if we do not like the outcome. That does serious damage and undermines confidence in such an office. That is not an acceptable way to move forward.

Dealing with any issues from our past is extremely difficult and, in all probability, has been one of the things that have proven most difficult for the Assembly to deal with. Dealing with the past and getting closure — the type of closure that Mr Wells talked about — and bringing that closure to a satisfactory conclusion is extremely difficult to achieve, given the legacy of the past 30-plus years. However, attacking the office of the Police Ombudsman because you do not like the report is not the way to do it, particularly when he could uncover no evidence to meet that objective.

Ms Ritchie: I can honestly say that no event in the entire history of the Troubles made a bigger impact on me personally than the brutal murder of six of my neighbours on that fateful day in June 1994 in Loughinisland. I remember vividly the shock and confusion that descended on a quiet community that day. Most of all, I remember breaking the news to my disbelieving parents that, in one moment of brutality, they had lost neighbours and two close family friends, Dan McCreanor and Barney Green. In fact, Dan McCreanor brought me directly from hospital to be baptised at St Patrick's Church, Downpatrick, many years ago. I remember the

devastated families and friends, and, years on, no one was ever brought to justice. Everyone believed that the police had not really tried to apprehend the murderers.

Last week, it had been expected that the long-awaited ombudsman's report on the police investigation of the Loughinisland killings would shed more light on what happened, confirm the inadequacies of the RUC response and confirm that there had been collusion. In the end, the several-times delayed ombudsman's report added little to the sum total of knowledge about the murders, but it did confirm the total inadequacy of the RUC response.

Despite the utter failures and systematic shortcomings of the RUC, the ombudsman has concluded that there was no collusion. That conclusion by the ombudsman flies in the face of his own evidence and, for the families of the victims, adds insult to injury. It is an unacceptable response. Former RUC investigators did not co-operate with the inquiry; there was systematic destruction of evidence and repeated failure to follow up leads or new evidence; many suspects brought in for questioning were not even fingerprinted or DNA tested; and informers and Special Branch were treated as off-limits. There was, undoubtedly, collusion in this case. The ombudsman's argument that there was incompetence but no collusion lacks basic credibility. I cannot explain the position of the ombudsman, other than to say that it was to prevent embarrassment or to protect other parts of the security and intelligence establishments. Such action is unacceptable.

12.15 pm

I have called on the Police Ombudsman to step down, a step I did not take lightly. I believe his position as ombudsman is no longer tenable, not just because he has let down the Loughinisland families on the issue of collusion — I share their anger — but because — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Ms Ritchie: I am no longer certain that his office is sufficiently independent. It is a vitally important institution at the heart of our policing and justice reforms, and it lives and dies by its independence.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Ritchie: It is an important part of new policing reforms. Friday was a bad day for our justice system and further pain for the Loughinisland families —

Mr Speaker: I must insist that the Member's time is up.

Ms Ritchie: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Kingsmills: Historical Enquiries Team Report

Mr Speaker: Mr Kennedy has sought leave to make a statement.

Mr Lunn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take your point of order after this item of business. I will start again: Mr Kennedy has sought leave to make a statement on the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) report on the Kingsmills massacre, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Kennedy to speak for three minutes on the subject. I will call other Members for the constituency concerned to speak for up to three minutes as well. Members will know that the convention is that there will be no interventions or vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until after the issue is dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity you have afforded the House to reflect on the welcome publication of the Historical Enquiries Team report on the Kingsmills massacre. I formally thank the HET for producing such a detailed report.

The massacre at Kingsmills represented one of the very darkest events of sectarian genocide ever witnessed by the people of Northern Ireland. It was a truly barbaric act that shocked and horrified the entire country. Like Mrs Ritchie's experience of the Loughinisland killings, the Kingsmills massacre had a profound impact on me personally, because I knew nine of the victims.

It is important that we reflect on the victims and their families at any opportunity that we have in the House. Therefore, for the record, those innocent victims that evening on 5 January 1976 were John Bryans, Robert Chambers, Reginald Chapman, Walter Chapman, Robert Freeburn, Joseph Lemmon, John McConville, James McWhirter, Robert Walker and Kenneth Worton. They were returning from their work in a Glenanne factory, armed only with lunch boxes. They were stopped and brutally murdered and done to death by the Provisional IRA. The ballistics report is devastating, as it links the killers of the 10 Protestant workmen to countless other murders and attacks prior to Kingsmills and in the years that followed.

Republicans have consistently tried to deny involvement in the incident, partly because of the deeply sectarian nature of the event. Now that the report has been published, the leadership of the republican movement has serious questions to answer. It will not be enough to say that the event was wrong, and it will not be enough or excusable to engage in “whataboutery”. The republican movement needs to come forward with the answers to the questions. Why did this happen? Why was it allowed to happen? Who was involved? Even now, will you admit it and give information to the police?

We should also say that there are serious criticisms of the role of the British Government and, particularly, the Irish Government. It is important that there are further investigations and inquiries into the actions of the police and the British and Irish Governments of the time. The families deserve clarity and answers. As a local representative and someone who knew the victims, I will stand by them in all their efforts.

Mr Irwin: Mr Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the HET report into the Kingsmills massacre.

The publication of this HET report confirms what people have long suspected: the South Armagh Republican Action Force was merely a flag of convenience for the Provisional IRA's evil south Armagh brigade. The report exposes as a lie the claims of successive republican leaders that the Provisional IRA was not responsible for the murders. It also exposes as a lie the claims of successive generations of republicans that the Provisional IRA never engaged in sectarian acts. This was ruthless, sectarian murder by the criminals of the IRA's south Armagh brigade. For Mitchel McLaughlin to refuse to accept reality shows that he is deluding no one but himself. The IRA killed those innocent people, and the HET has confirmed that.

Ten innocent men were gunned down in cold blood for no other reason than that they were Protestants. As a consequence of the IRA's sectarian murder at Kingsmills, 14 innocent children were left without their fathers. Indeed, one other young man, Alan Black, suffered horrendous injuries from 18 bullets but survived. The Kingsmills massacre was a squalid sectarian act by a group of criminals. It stands out in the long, dark history of Northern Ireland for the sheer brutality of the way in which those men

were murdered. Armed terrorists demanded that people identify themselves according to their religion and then murdered those who were Protestants.

The publication of the report is important as it shows, in the public domain, that the IRA was responsible. No one from the republican movement will ever again be able to cast doubt on the identity of the perpetrators or seek to absolve the IRA of its guilt. We have it now in black and white that the IRA, not some freelance republican group, killed those men. It is to be hoped that the publication of the report will lead to new information coming forward. I hope that the criminals responsible are brought to justice.

Mr Murphy: The issues that we are dealing with, in the previous discussion and this one, highlight the challenge facing all of us in devising a process to deal with the legacy issues of the past.

What happened at Kingsmills was wrong and should not have happened. I have no difficulty in condemning it. I extend my sympathy to the families of those who were killed on that day. The unjustified killings took place in an era in which sectarian attacks on civilians were commonplace in County Armagh. Attacks on families, such as the Reavey and O'Dowd families, on public places, such as Donnelly's Bar and the Rock Bar in Keady, and on individuals were a common feature of life then. Some of those attacks and incidents, such as that on the Reavey family, have been the subject of inquiries, and others have not. In this case, the HET report and the many questions it raises highlight the urgent need to address the issue of legacy. Dealing with the past in a stop-start fashion, whether through HET reports or other work done by the ombudsman or work by campaigning families, does not address the broader issues or properly help the many, many families who continue to suffer in fighting for the truth. Taking opportunities in the Assembly to talk about specific incidents is dealing with the issue of legacy in a stop-start fashion. We need to grasp this issue. It is our firm view that an international truth commission is required. Unfortunately, to date, the British Government have run away from such an inclusive process.

I hope that the families of those killed in Kingsmills achieve a satisfactory outcome to the issues they have raised on the back of this report. The challenge for all of us is to devise a

process in which all those involved in or affected by the conflict can deal with the legacy issues that arise from that conflict in a manner that is as satisfactory as possible to all those involved. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The sectarian murder of 10 workmen at Kingsmills in January 1976 was one of the worst incidents of murderous slaughter ever to take place here. I come from Bessbrook myself and knew many of the victims, some of them very well, and, likewise, their families. All the victims were totally innocent men who were on their way home from doing a day's work. Eleven people were shot that day, 10 of whom died. Alan Black, the sole survivor, was left at death's door but survived. His life, too, has been blighted by the attack, as was the case with the late Richard Hughes, the only Catholic on the bus. He was singled out and told to walk towards Newry. His two friends Reggie and Walter Chapman, who died that day, held his arm and told him to stand his ground. That was a measure of the goodness of those men and of the friendship between them.

I welcome the report of the Historical Enquiries Team. It is the first thorough, official, documented recognition of what happened at Kingsmills. It attributes responsibility to the Provisional IRA, and I believe that the onus is now on Sinn Féin to live up to its plans for a truth and reconciliation commission by publicly accepting the HET forensic evidence on the firearms that were used.

I welcome the fact that the report makes it clear that Eugene Reavey was on his way to Daisy Hill Hospital that evening to receive the bodies of his two murdered brothers and could not possibly have been involved. I take the opportunity once again to appeal to Dr Paisley to do the honourable thing in relation to Mr Reavey.

Like the families of the Loughinisland victims, the families of the Kingsmills victims were failed by the police investigation. To this day, the police have never interviewed the first two witnesses on the scene of the Kingsmills murders. That is an indication of how superficial the investigation was, and I believe that the families deserve better.

I hope that the HET report leads the families of the Kingsmills victims a step closer to knowing the truth about what happened to their loved ones, and I will support them in every possible

way to achieve the justice that they so richly deserve.

Mr Speaker: Order. That ends Matters of the Day. I will take Mr Lunn's point of order now.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party would have wished to contribute to the discussions that have just passed, but you ruled that, because this was a constituency Matter of the Day, we could not do so, as we do not have a Member in either constituency. I ask you to reflect on the Hansard report of 22 February, when there was a similar discussion on the report on the bombing of McGurk's Bar. We were allowed to speak then even though we do not have a Member in that constituency, and I think that other parties also got the same allowance.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Let me deal with Mr Lunn's point of order first. Mr Dickson met me this morning on the issue, but all these matters are taken as individual Matters of the Day, and, as the Member will know, it is really at the call of the Speaker. I was happy to take the Member's point of order, and the Member now has it on the record. Let me reflect and take away what the Member has said and look at it over the summer. However, as the Member will know and as I will repeat, these decisions are matters for the Speaker. In fact, I will even go further and say to the whole House that these matters should not be challenged and it is not in order for any Member to challenge such a decision, especially on Matters of the Day. However, I am very happy to take on board what the Member said, and I will reflect on it.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, when reflecting on the exercise of the discretion, which, of course, one has to accept in this circumstance, is it not the case that, by its very nature, to qualify as a Matter of the Day, an issue must have wider ramifications than those that pertain to a particular constituency? These two dreadful atrocities well demonstrate that, because the ramifications affected the whole Province. In those circumstances, is it not surprising that debate is limited to what happens to be the constituency where the dreadful atrocity took place?

Mr Speaker: Once again, I hear what the Member said on the issue. I will take it away and reflect on what he and Mr Lunn said this morning.

However, Members need to understand that all these issues are taken as individual cases and are dealt with in the Speaker's Office as individual cases. Let me say to the whole House that Members know that I am very protective of the smaller parties in this Chamber and especially Back-Benchers.

As Speaker, I certainly have no desire to stifle debate in the Chamber. Members will know that I try, where possible, to accommodate the smaller parties in the House, and I will continue to do so in the future. Once again I say to Members that these decisions are taken by the Speaker, and the Speaker alone.

12.30 pm

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

Mr Speaker: Before we begin, I wish to advise the House that this morning I was given notice by Mr Swann and Mr Weir of a motion to extend the sitting past 7.00 pm, under Standing Order 10(3A). The Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Mr Swann: I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 27 June 2011 be extended to no later than 9.00 pm.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 27 June 2011 be extended to no later than 9.00 pm.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Wilson, to move the Further Consideration of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move that the Budget (No. 2) Bill do now pass. The passing of the Final Stage of the Budget Bill by the House will enable Departments to continue to use resources and to spend cash on public services for the remainder of the financial year. Of course, the monitoring rounds will amend the opening position reflected in the Bill, and I will bring a further Bill to the House in February 2012 to authorise the final position for 2011-12.

The public expenditure issues around the Bill have now been debated fully over the past two weeks, and — I am sure that you will be pleased to hear — I do not propose to repeat those today in my opening remarks. Suffice it to say that the provision in the Bill represents the first year of the Budget 2011-15, as agreed by the previous Assembly in March.

Mr Speaker: Minister, just to clarify: we are speaking to the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. We have not yet moved on to the Final Stage of the Bill. I am just getting clarity from the Minister.

Mr Wilson: Sorry, Mr Speaker. I thought that you called me to move the Final Stage. I am ahead of myself.

Moved, That the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill be now taken. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget (No. 2) Bill at this stage. Further Consideration Stage is, therefore, concluded.

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Final Stage

Mr Speaker: Now we come to the Final Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

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

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] do now pass.

I will not replay the tape so far but will instead take up where I left off.

I do not wish to repeat the remarks that have been made in the previous debates. Suffice it to say that the provision in the Bill represents the first year of Budget 2011-15, as agreed by the previous Assembly in March. However, Members will recall that the Budget included provision for an assistance package for the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) savers. The Executive's and the Treasury's contributions were held at the centre awaiting the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) confirmation that details of the rescue package had been agreed. I understand that the administrator will be in a position to start to make payments over the summer, subject to the satisfactory completion of the final legal and contractual issues. Therefore, I considered it vital to anticipate the June monitoring transfer to DETI and to include the PMS expenditure in the DETI Main Estimate and the Bill to provide DETI with the legal authority for the expenditure. To await the spring Supplementary Estimates and the related Budget Bill in February 2012 would delay the statutory provision for the PMS expenditure and hold up payments to investors and savers, for which they would not have forgiven either me or the Executive, especially as a final resolution of the saga is so tantalisingly close.

I now want to return to an issue that is related to the expenditure plans that we are approving today in the Bill and that I have brought to the attention of the House in previous debates: the long overdue review of our financial process that the previous Executive commissioned in February. The current financial process has existed for many years and is based on the Westminster model. The review is an opportunity for the Assembly to reform the process and publications in line with its requirements.

As recently as last Wednesday, my officials held a useful session with the Committee for Finance and Personnel to discuss the review

and to explore some of the areas that merit consideration. I have also asked my officials to present the issues to Members at a consultation event in the Long Gallery in the autumn. I encourage all Members to attend that event and to avail themselves of the opportunity to propose the areas that, in their view, merit reform. The review presents Members with a golden opportunity to reform the current process and publications that we inherited from direct rule. Therefore, over the coming months, I urge Members to consider the weaknesses in the current process and to make a considered contribution to the review.

My officials have also opened communication with Departments and the Northern Ireland Audit Office on the review. Over the coming months, the dialogue will continue, and I look forward, following a robust discussion of the issues with all key stakeholders — I consider the Assembly to be the main stakeholder — to bringing recommendations to the Executive and the House before the end of the financial year.

I will now speak about the remainder of this financial year and the challenges that lie ahead. As the recent June monitoring round demonstrated, the demand for additional resources always outstrips the funding that is available to the Executive for allocation. Therefore, Ministers and their Departments must continue to manage prudently the resources that are available to them throughout the remainder of the year. In particular, I call on Departments to surrender any reduced requirements in the next monitoring round rather than hold on to them until too near the end of the financial year, by which time it is too late for other Departments to spend the resources. We must act corporately and astutely as an Administration, particularly in the light of the proposed new budget exchange scheme and the efforts that will be required by all concerned to avoid surrendering any of our invaluable resources to the Treasury. With that appeal, I bring my remarks to a close, and I ask Members to support the Bill's Final Stage.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I stated at Second Stage, the Committee for Finance and Personnel is aware of the potential consequences for departmental spending should the Bill not progress through the Assembly before the summer recess. In that regard, the Committee

was content for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage.

The Minister will be aware that departmental officials informally briefed the Committee last week on the review of the financial process that the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is taking forward on behalf of the Executive. Indeed, he referred to that meeting. The officials outlined a number of problems with the current process and publications that relate to Budgets, Estimates and Accounts. Committee members heard that there are a number of misalignments in the current process that may not be immediately evident, including the fact that, although it is set out in the Executive's Budget, capital spend is not voted on in the Budget Bills that come before the House. Indeed, it may surprise Members to learn that up to one quarter of all government spend is not voted on. There are also issues with the complexity of the Estimates; with the differing boundaries and controls for the Budgets and the Estimates; with the differing ways in which information is presented in the various associated publications; and with repetition in the process.

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

Immediately after the informal session with departmental officials, the Committee received a briefing from the Assembly's Research and Information Service on considerations for improving the wider Budget process in the context of the Executive's review of the financial process. The related research paper considered international best practice guidance and reports from the previous Committee for Finance and Personnel, and it set out key recommendations for the future Budget process. The recommendations include the establishment of a calendar in advance of future Budget processes that must be adhered to and that includes adequate time for consultation; the inclusion of a strategic phase before the production of the draft Budget to allow the Assembly to debate revenue measures and spending priorities; and the inclusion of a formal review stage in the process to allow for reconsideration of the Budget in the light of emerging spending pressures or policy reorientation. The Committee asked that those recommendations be taken forward by DFP in parallel with the Executive's review. In particular, as I mentioned during the previous debate, the Committee will be keen to ensure that formal engagement is incorporated into the process at an

early stage. We believe that that will facilitate the streamlining of the latter stages of the process.

It is clear that there is much work to be done to address those issues and create a Budget process here that is more transparent, provides greater accountability and meets the needs of the Assembly. Improved Budget and financial processes will underpin the important scrutiny role of the Assembly and, in turn, help to drive improvements in public services and ensure that the Executive's priorities are delivered and that government in general remains effective and accountable. My Committee looks forward to working closely with the Department in progressing this important work in the coming session. In the meantime, I support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I, too, speak in favour of the Bill. I welcome the opportunity to reiterate what the Minister said about the PMS. The process of accelerated passage will help the people who have suffered greatly over the past number of years due to the problems associated with the PMS. The Bill's passing will allow movement on that. I also welcome the review and reform of financial processes and how we set and debate Budgets. That will help to streamline the process.

We have debated the Budget Bill quite a bit in the past two weeks. I will not regurgitate everything that everyone else has already said. I support the Bill, as presented, to allow us to move forward. I do not wish to take any more time. I appreciate that some funds had to be allocated to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to allow a move forward on the PMS issue. It is important that we, as an Assembly, deliver on the Executive's agreed process and the Budget as presented.

Mr Cree: When this process resumed two weeks ago, I expressed my opinion that it was cumbersome, convoluted and repetitive. It lacks clarity and transparency and is not fit for purpose. Budgets, Estimates and accounts serve different purposes and have gone their own ways over the years. That makes it extremely difficult to understand, manage and scrutinise. Only about 60% of government spend is aligned across all the frameworks, so inefficient and burdensome reconciliations are required. However, work has begun on a new model that will better serve the Assembly. We have heard from the Minister and the Chairman of the Committee about that this afternoon.

The new process must draw together all the various parts of the Budget process, including the rates income stream and non-departmental bodies. Unfortunately, that has not helped us this year, and we are resigned to the circus that we call the Budget process. Fortunately, however, we also have a ringmaster to take centre stage and provide some light relief. Earlier this year, the Ulster Unionist Party did not support the Budget for several reasons that I have repeated in the House. We still have those concerns, but the DUP and Sinn Féin have approved the Budget and will endorse it again today. Therefore, it would be illogical for us to vote against it at Final Stage.

Dr McDonnell: I will make a few brief comments. I will avoid repeating some of the earlier comments and leave it to others to discuss the technical details. I will focus on the economic opportunities and the potential in the Budget to create economic development and opportunity.

I do not think that I am letting out any state secrets by saying that we are in difficult economic times. We need to be very careful that we avoid eating the seedcorn, as it were. However, in our Budget efforts, we need to ensure that we put aside some amount of money, no matter how small, to invest for the future and create and develop opportunities.

12.45 pm

Our economic outlook is challenging, to put it mildly, and the full impact of Government spending cuts of some £4 billion between 2011 and 2015 has yet to fully hit our economy. Output appears to be stagnant and growth is barely detectable. However, although we can focus on the negatives, I prefer to focus on the opportunities arising in the current context and ensure that we take the necessary steps through the Budget to deliver a creative and successful economic recovery strategy. If slippage money becomes available as we go through the year, I urge the Minister to invest it in creating opportunities, some of which I will refer to.

We want to ensure that the Northern Ireland economy is in a strong and vibrant position, able to meet future opportunities and business and commercial needs. The Budget goes some way towards facilitating an economic recovery strategy, but there are key areas that I want to highlight and urge the Minister to pay a little bit more attention to as we go forward. R&D is

the big one, the key opportunity, because even in good economic times, our efficiency and effectiveness was only at some 85% or 87% of GB's. There is some dullness or bluntness in our economic activity when we lag significantly behind Britain — Scotland, Wales and England — in our efforts — *[Interruption.]* Sorry. Pardon me. That was not planned.

R&D has to add value, and, if we are to compete with Third World countries and the Far East, we have to sharpen up our industry and how we do things in order to get a commercial edge and work to our strengths. We have many strengths.

Excellent research has been done in our universities and hospitals. Perhaps we fall down in supporting the full commercialisation and taking full advantage of some of the excellent brainpower we have. One of the things I think of immediately is the Belfast cancer centre. I urge the Minister to find ways and means of investing further in the next phase of the centre. We now have in Belfast a world-class, globally recognised cancer centre, to which we can recruit people from across the world for their manpower, expertise and specialist skills. However, we are one stage short of turning that round and selling those skills back to the rest of the world. In recent developments, I was fascinated to see on television that Belfast City Hospital researchers had managed to extract a cancer-curing product from the saliva of a Brazilian tree frog. That may sound very abstract, but that is the level we are at: the cutting edge of world cancer research. We should look at ways to find some money, no matter how small the amount, to recognise that we have potential in that area. If we invest in it, Belfast City Hospital, through its research, has the potential to become an economic engine for the twenty-first century, just as Harland and Wolff, Shorts, Mackie's and other firms were the engines of the nineteenth century. That is one example of how we might unlock potential.

I do not want to discuss the EU's seventh framework programme or the potential that lies there, but we have to find ways and means of encouraging our companies to open up their R&D and do things better, more efficiently and more effectively.

I also want to draw the Minister's attention to the fact that food production is a sunrise industry. For the past 30 or 40 years, the European Union has had a surplus of food,

but it is recognised that, by 2015, shortfalls will begin. The economies of China are now eating everything they can get. People in China now want better quality food and so on. In a few years' time, we will be unable to procure food from Australia or New Zealand. Similarly, we will be unable to procure it from the likes of Argentina. Food will have to be produced. I was fascinated to watch a brief documentary on television last night that stated that Britain, although it imports meat, exports its high-quality Aberdeen Angus beef to China. That is a position that we have to get into. We have to find ways of investing in food production, because we fall between two stools. We do not have a brand. Irish beef is highly branded and recognised across Europe, but British beef, and not just British beef but subdivisions—

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member to return to the subject of the Budget.

Dr McDonnell: I am on the Budget. This is what the Budget has to invest in, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is a lot of opportunity in the food industry.

The other area that I want to draw the Minister's attention to is that of renewable energy. We have got to put more resources in. Our resources going into energy are far too limited. We need a stronger energy division. If I had my way, I would have a junior Minister for energy and a separate energy Department, and I would bolster the energy division in DETI. However, there are a number of issues, Minister, and although we have recognised some of the challenges, I feel that if we are to brace ourselves to become independent, with a high financial return, and to be successful in the future with a prosperous economy, there has to be a sharper focus in the Budget on developing sunrise industries. Those industries have the potential to return much more than we invest in them.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for the fact that my telephone rang. I thought that I had switched it off.

Mrs Cochrane: The Alliance Party will support the Final Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill for the same reasons that we gave in support of the Supply resolution and the Bill's Second Stage. However, I will take this opportunity to raise a few key points.

As we progress into the first year of the budgetary period of 2011-15, it must be acknowledged that, with inflation now well in excess of the level

on which the Budget was originally premised, Departments must work harder than ever to live within budget. They need to focus on making efficiencies wherever possible and on producing additional capital receipts as well as realising those already identified. I appreciate that that will not be easy for Departments and that many difficult decisions will have to be made if we are to be able to maintain spend on front line services.

We need to continue to focus on rebuilding the economy, creating jobs and preparing future generations and those out of work for the years ahead. We need to capitalise on tourism, which offers long-term benefits, as tourists spend money and contribute to our economy, and we need to ensure that situations such as what happened in east Belfast last week do not hinder that development. Just a matter of hours after the riots, and less than a mile from the scene, the Crown Princess cruise ship docked, with 3,100 tourists on board. Scores of coaches lined up to take avid travellers to various sites around Northern Ireland to spend money and take home stories of our beautiful country. So easily, the petrol-bombings, shootings and so on can send out the wrong message and wreck our chances of continuing to attract those vital visitors.

That brings me to my key point, which is that the only way in which we can deal with such issues and drive our economy forward is through greater collaboration among Departments. For example, DETI needs to generate investment, and that investment needs to be linked to the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to invest in skills. Indeed, in his Budget statement in March, the Finance Minister spoke about the importance of such collaboration, but we need not just to talk; the emphasis must be on delivery.

We already have technology in place that allows sharing of information across Departments, yet we appear to choose not to use it to its full capacity. Around four years ago, Departments implemented Total Records and Information Management (TRIM) software. That can and should be much more than a document repository. It has a multitude of configuration options that allow Departments to have access to one another's information in a secure manner. Perhaps sharing such information could more effectively assist Departments in coming up with efficiency options, as well as solutions

to address the financial costs of our divided society. At a time when finances are so tight, and when we are trying to grow our economy, the resources wasted on managing division continue to be a massive millstone around our necks.

The Alliance Party will continue to promote more shared services on a North/South basis. This need not be about politics but about good finance and good economics. We welcome the scoping of the potential for that through the North/South Ministerial Council. As a member of the North/South Parliamentary Forum working group, I can see the benefits of working together across neighbouring jurisdictions. The forum could be another opportunity to benchmark in order to assist us in deciding how much should be spent in certain areas and assessing where inefficiencies exist and where we can improve. This is not about political grandstanding but about practical issues.

As a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I have been involved in discussions about the level of detail provided during the budgetary process and whether it is available in sufficient time for adequate scrutiny. That has been highlighted by the Chair of the Committee and others. I look forward to the outcome of the review of the financial process, which, hopefully, will streamline the Budget and Estimates process and enhance scrutiny by, and accountability to, the Assembly.

I support the motion.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will be very brief. I think that the Minister outlined in sufficient detail, without bearing any repetition, the salient and important elements of the Budget.

I would like to make a few remarks about the process. I very much welcome the review. The Finance Committee has been campaigning on this issue virtually since the beginning of the previous mandate, so it is long overdue but welcome.

The economic circumstances in which we approach the Budget this time challenged the Assembly, respective parties and MLAs to begin to think the process out. It was not just a matter of taking a cake of a particular size and having a discussion, as opposed to a Budget process, about how it should be divided up in the most equitable way. On this occasion parties here were challenged to come up with

suggestions for incrementally building on what was a greatly reduced cake in the circumstances of the comprehensive spending review (CSR) settlement. Most parties put in practical ideas.

That and the present campaign to bring fiscal powers back to the Assembly were the beginning of the Assembly's starting to consider the challenge of how it matches its expectations and ambitions in the delivery of programmes and services with its ability to supplement the block grant. I think that that process should continue. In that context, I also strongly support and welcome the work of the Budget review group, which is an all-party grouping of Executive Ministers who look at the various issues, including the questions of over-bureaucracy and the dismantling of what we might call the ugly scaffolding of direct rule.

Periodic reports on the work of the Budget review process would be very helpful, as perhaps would reminders to the parties to continue to contribute to that festival of ideas. That is because we need to be supportive if we are going to protect not just jobs but, crucially, front line services. On this occasion, the Budget has been complex, and I think that the discussions have been heated at times. However, generally speaking, people are rooted in the reality that we are operating in a deficit Budget situation and that we all have to put our shoulders to the wheel to come up with ideas for new revenues and more efficiencies, as well as to dismantle or strip down some of the overly complex bureaucracy that is slowing the system up.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I recall, going back to the time before the beginning of this Budget period, when we were becoming aware of the magnitude of the cuts that we would be facing, the Finance Minister telling us that bitter medicine was coming from London and that we would have to swallow it. He said there would be no point in us opposing or railing against the cuts. To use his terminology, there was no point in "gurning" — we would have to pinch our noses and swallow the bitter medicine.

The SDLP took a different approach to the Budget settlement, and as early as 2009 we set out to find ways of mitigating its effect. We published our ideas in the paper 'New Priorities in Difficult Times'.

So anyone who says that the SDLP was negative about the budgetary process has only to look at our record, which clearly shows that we were first off the blocks to help to ensure that everything possible was done to mitigate the effects of the worst ever cuts — 8% to resource and 40% to capital — to face us here in Northern Ireland.

1.00 pm

As the Minister knows, our engagement in the budgetary process did not end there. We continued to work on ways of raising revenue, creating jobs, protecting front line services and ensuring the best possible deal for the most vulnerable in society. Our document 'Partnership and Economic Recovery' — I know that the Minister has read it many times — is a comprehensive approach to tackling the challenges that our economy and finances face. We were critical where we saw the need for improvements, and we were vociferous when we needed to be. The Minister did not always like what we had to say, but I think that even he realises that we are not nodding dogs that will sit here and hang on his every word.

The Budget is the Minister's baby, and I understand his desire to nurse it and protect it. The Minister gradually came round to our way of thinking that it was not enough just to sit back, open one's mouth and take the medicine without complaint. Work began on identifying sources of revenue to replace that taken by the cuts. The extent to which that work has been successful is a moot point. First, there was to be £1.6 billion; then there was £862 million; and now, I believe, there is £900 million, according to the Minister's speech in the Chamber last week. What happened to the remainder of the money is not quite clear.

We are not yet sure whether that £900 million is new money. I asked the Minister to clarify the situation by telling us how much of the £900 million was from the normal government receipts from the sale of Housing Executive properties, land, and so on, and how much of it was new money coming into the Budget. I do not think that he clarified that for us. During a previous debate, the Minister stated that the Budget was the best Christmas present that Northern Ireland could hope for, but, as I said, once you loosen the ribbons and remove the wrapping paper, there is not quite as much in the present as we were first led to believe.

That said, we are where we are. The SDLP is intent on continuing to work on and engage in reshaping and remoulding the Budget.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I listened to what the Member said about the document, but I am not so sure that the Minister will have paid much attention to it. During previous debates in the House, the SDLP document was exposed as leaving clear gaps in the finance that it could provide for the Minister and the economy. I ask the Member: given the difficult situation in which we find ourselves in the United Kingdom, had the House voted in the way that the SDLP voted, how would your party have sustained the community and voluntary sector, which was crying out for money at that time?

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not claim that every proposal in the paper was perfect, but there were many viable proposals, which would and will produce additional revenue. I hope and expect that the Minister will continue to examine those proposals and that the Budget review group will do likewise. As I said, we will continue to engage, through the Committees and at Executive level, to reshape and remould the Budget to ensure that it meets the needs of the greatest possible number of people in Northern Ireland.

I was glad to hear from the Minister, during the Bill's Second Stage last week, that the First Minister and deputy First Minister had spoken to their counterparts in Scotland about the Scottish Futures Trust. He said that that initiative would be given further consideration. The Minister took the opportunity to score a few political points against the SDLP, but it was more a question of him being willing to wound but afraid to strike. We came out of that skirmish relatively unscathed.

The Minister also responded to the point that I made about the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. I was pleased to hear that the Minister for Regional Development is continuing to work with the commissioners to see how that money can be paid over to the Executive. The Minister said that he is willing to go down the legislative route if necessary. We continue to hold the view that this Budget should have been based on a Programme for Government for 2011-15 and an updated investment strategy, to demonstrate how strategic policies are driving

financial allocations rather than vice versa. I will be interested to hear from the Minister what progress has been made on the formulation of a Programme for Government and when we should expect to see it.

I also want to ask the Minister about the £4 billion in capital funding that remains to be paid for the final two years of the investment strategy up to 2017. Will there be continued negotiations on that, or is it his view that that money is now lost to Northern Ireland? I hope that that is not the case, because in this economic climate, with the huge cut to capital, we need that money more than ever.

As we know, the end-year flexibility (EYF) scheme is being replaced by the budget exchange scheme. There are some problems with that, especially around the predictions that have to be made in the October round. Departments have said that that will be extremely difficult for them and that money could be lost to Northern Ireland through that model. If the Treasury proposal continues in its present form, it will be tantamount to a further cut. I know that the Minister has entered negotiations with the Treasury in order to shape a better scheme for us. I urge him to continue his efforts in that direction, because it is money that we can ill afford to lose.

I thank the Minister for his representations to the Irish Government on the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) situation and the possibility of a fire sale. I note that he said that he had discussions with Minister Bruton on the issue and that he has been reassured that such a fire sale will not take place. That is very welcome. If my memory serves me right, I asked the Minister last week whether he agreed that work should be undertaken on North/South health co-operation, given that 40% of budgets North and South are spent in that area. However, I do not recall the Minister responding to that point. Perhaps he will do so today.

One of the other points that I made last week was about the £4 million that was set aside for a childcare strategy. The Minister said that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) ministerial subcommittee was working on that issue. A number of childcare organisations, especially those which participated in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) pilot schemes, are now in dire need of resources. I urge the

Minister to do all in his power to ensure that those resources become available to those groups as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the SDLP will continue to engage on the Budget, which, as the Minister said, is not set in stone. Through the Committees and in the Executive, we will continue to ensure that the Budget is fit for purpose and best serves the needs of the people of Northern Ireland. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Byrne: Any Budget debate should primarily be about measuring the allocation of resources against a backdrop of trying to match government objectives with the targets and policy initiatives of an agreed Programme for Government. In this type of devolved government — a five-party mandatory coalition — the task of putting together a Budget for an agreed set of priorities and outcomes is difficult. It is even more difficult if the Finance Minister has to balance his party's priorities with other parties' objectives. The temptation then is to go for a Budget that lacks coherence and strategy.

We will get no real economic gain from the current Budget proposals. I do not see any stimulus for the local economy, particularly for the construction industry. Unfortunately, it is currently a purely accounting exercise, with no underpinning rationale other than to live within cash limits as delivered by the comprehensive spending review. That begs the question: can we have a meaningful Budget process when we do not have an agreed Programme for Government that includes a four- or five-year policy strategy? Almost every economist, economic commentator and, indeed, political party represented here says that the priority for the region and the Assembly should be to make the economy and economic development the key priority for the future. I accept that.

We all recognise that, in effect, the Assembly is charged with managing a delegated Budget, as delivered by the Treasury's Barnett formula. In reality, this regional economy is highly dependent on a net resources transfer from central government in London. The annual net subvention currently runs at £8 billion a year or more. That huge inward annual cheque highlights the public sector dependency culture that is now the norm for our regional economy. That affects us all, not just those who are

unemployed or on benefits. The challenge, therefore, is to see whether we can do anything with the devolved Budget to correct that imbalance and reconfigure the economy. That is a major task and a challenge for the new Assembly. The harsh economic reality is that the London Treasury will cut back on the annual subvention, making the entire business of government more difficult. We know about the 8% cut in revenue expenditure, and we are very aware of the 40% cut in capital expenditure over the term of the mandate.

On the surface, the welfare state has been very good for and generous to Northern Ireland, in that people have a safety net for a basic standard of living. Many communities and areas in Northern Ireland depend greatly on benefits. However, our public sector dependency of nearly 80% is quite staggering. It means that many private sector supply companies are highly dependent on government supply contracts.

The current debate and general consensus on corporation tax obliquely poses the big economic question: can the region become more economically viable through having a more competitive and productive private sector? That is the challenge. Can the regional economy get to a position of having a more effective and efficient public sector? Now we have a Budget that is just an accounting exercise, simply slicing up the Treasury transfer cake rather than tackling the more difficult challenge of setting out on a course to get better economic performance in the future.

I welcome what the Minister said about having a Budget review group, which is long overdue. Again, I pose the question: how can we have a meaningful budgetary process when we do not have an economic strategy determined by a Programme for Government? This Budget debate could centre on a piecemeal approach, as we all call for specific money for specific projects or services, but that only ignores and avoids the real problem and task ahead. A Budget process must attempt to shape and steer a local economy to a better performance in respect of productive output and general economic activity.

1.15 pm

We all come under constant pressure at a local level to lobby for funding for a project or a local service provision or facility. That is the stuff that all of us hear in our constituencies. The

bigger challenge for the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Finance Minister is how they formulate a Budget that is fit for purpose. That begs the real question: what is the key purpose and function of the key civil servants in the Department of Finance and Personnel in the entire process? The reality is that custom and practice, underpinned by the historical cost premise, rules the roost. How, therefore, will we get the economic gear change that is needed to reconfigure this local economy and have a more sustainable economic performance in the immediate to long term?

Are the current Budget proposals and the outlines for the rest of this mandate purely an accounting exercise, with no route map based on a Programme for Government or an investment strategy for Northern Ireland? We have had two investment strategies for Northern Ireland, but I have not heard much about any recently. Do the Minister and Executive intend to follow custom and practice, or is there a willingness or desire to have a better way, which has, at its core, the twin objectives of building a stronger local economy by having a more productive and expanding private sector and having a more effective and efficient public sector that delivers services to our people?

Do we have an economic modelling unit in the Finance Department? Do we have an economic forecasting and performance unit? For this devolved Assembly to function, it is critical that we have some sort of modelling unit in the Department.

What is the future for the Strategic Investment Board? It was set up about 10 years ago and was lauded; we were told that it would provide the intervention necessary to make capital projects work. I have not heard of the Strategic Investment Board for some time. Is it dead or alive? Is its executive director still on the payroll? Those are crucial questions that we have to ask.

The time is right to have a more radical and focused approach to our future economic planning and management. Do the Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel accept that a different approach is desirable? Is it likely to be embarked on at this time? I welcome what the Minister said earlier.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat,

a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to address the House as Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. When I spoke last week during the Bill's Second Stage, I talked about the Committee's desire to constructively engage with the Department about how it will manage its allocation for 2011-12. To that end, we will hear from departmental officials on that subject at our Committee meeting on Wednesday. We will take that opportunity to drill down into the details of the options that the Minister is considering to make the savings that are required this year if he is to balance the books.

Although savings have to be made, money is available to those who ask. The Committee noted that, under June monitoring, some £29 million of resource was allocated to various Departments. However, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) did not make any bids under June monitoring and, therefore, did not receive any money. The Committee was very disappointed to find out that that was the case given that specific projects that were previously funded by the Department up to March 2011 have now been left stranded because funding is not available.

For example, the Committee wrote recently to the Department to ask whether the decision to no longer fund the Music Therapy Trust could be reversed. It has been receiving central government funding since 2003 and has made a real difference to children and adults with a wide range of conditions. The trust requires only £400,000 per annum. Surely, if the Department had made a specific bid for funding for the project under the June monitoring round, £400,000 could have been found out of the £29 million that was available. A similar case could be made for Home-Start, which also has had its funding discontinued.

On making savings, last week, the Committee heard at first hand about the innovations that Health Service staff are coming up with and which are beneficial to patient safety and the public purse. Last Wednesday, we visited Altnagelvin Area Hospital and were briefed by staff from the Western Trust on the work that they are doing, particularly in the field of cancer. The Committee learned that radiotherapy, which the new centre at Altnagelvin will provide, is not only a highly effective treatment in curing and extending the lifespan of people with cancer but

is more cost-effective than surgery or drugs. By making sure that people receive radiotherapy quickly and appropriately, the Health Service can ensure the best chance of a good outcome for the patient and also for the budget.

Similarly, we heard about the excellent work that is being done at Altnagelvin in the provision of human papilloma virus (HPV) testing in the Western Trust. HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer, but the Western Trust is the only trust that is carrying out that important work. By being able to test for HPV and thereby being able to offer immediate treatment for those who need it, the trust is making massive savings on cervical screening. Under the old cervical screening pathway, a woman with an abnormal result may have to go through 13 screenings over a 12-year period. The new system will require only two screenings in an eight-month period. Given that each smear and screening costs £40, the savings soon add up. We also heard about the screening programme for bowel cancer. Again, if that cancer is caught in the early stages, the prognosis is very good, and costly treatments — in financial and, more importantly, in human terms — can be avoided.

There are great examples of people at the front line finding new ways of working that are yielding massive benefits to patients as well as being an efficient use of resources. Change is possible where there is the will to do it. In our previous meeting with the Department, the Committee was frustrated that, when we suggested that it should make the prescribing of generic drugs mandatory, we were told about the problems with making that happen rather than the solution to it. Therefore, we have asked the Department to produce a paper to detail the obstacles to, and complexities of, introducing a policy to make the prescribing of generic drugs mandatory and to clarify whether that would require a change to legislation. We look forward to discussing that further with the Department, because that is one way in which it could ensure that it lives within the 2011-12 budget.

The Committee recognises that this year will be difficult because of limited resources, but where there is the will to make changes and work differently, savings can be made without impacting on front line services.

Mr Eastwood: I do not propose to speak for too long, because the arguments around the Budget have been well rehearsed by now. In the

Chamber and other places, we have been told that the people voted for stability on 5 May. That is true; undoubtedly, people for voted stability, and they are delighted that we are working together in the Assembly and the Executive and laughing at each others' jokes. However, people will now begin to judge us by a higher standard, and, in four years, they will judge us on what we have delivered.

Unfortunately, I do not think that this Budget will deliver. The arguments on that are clear, and the bottom line is that the Budget will make people's lives worse not better. Thousands of public sector workers fear for their jobs, and there is no real attempt to buffer the most vulnerable people in society from the real impacts of the benefit cuts that will come from London. There is no strategy for job creation, and school principals will be panicking at the fact that there will be no real attempt to build new schools or to bring about much-needed repairs to others.

We are fearful about higher tuition fees and all that that can do, which the House will debate this afternoon, and about the potential scrapping of the education maintenance allowance. In my constituency in Derry, people are fed up with hearing about the jobs that are being created by the Executive. All the time, we are given examples of the hundreds and thousands of jobs that are coming to Northern Ireland, but we do not see them in Derry. People in my constituency will begin to hold the Executive to a higher standard.

We know all of the arguments and have made them a number of times. As party colleagues have done, I commit to keep working with the Minister and Executive colleagues to ensure that we do our best to make the Budget and the Programme for Government — when we ever see it — fit for purpose. That is all I have to say for now.

Mr Allister: Last week, in responding to the Second Stage debate, the Minister described me as the Elijah of the Assembly. If that was meant to be some sort of slight or insult from new DUP, I am afraid that I treat it more as a compliment because I am very happy to be associated with those who have not bowed the knee to terrorist-inclusive government. If, in my time here, I manage to slay — metaphorically, of course — a few prophets of Baal, I will be very happy with the work that that involves.

However, there are issues, whether the Minister likes it or not, that have to be returned to in respect of this Budget. For all the gloss, spin, hyperbole and bluster that the Minister delivers to us, it is quite clear to anyone who analyses the document that it is frayed, tawdry and bereft of detail that would speak to a cogent strategy. The Minister's colleague Mr Ian Paisley Jnr spoke of this place as not even matching up to a good county council. Would this Budget even match up to a good county council budget, given its lack of vision, cogency, and connection with what should be the pathfinders of policy? It is totally dysfunctional and displaced from any notion of a Programme for Government. It does not at all cross the tramlines of an investment strategy. It is simply a little self-contained allocation of block grant funding to various silo Departments in what passes for government in Northern Ireland. Each Department gets its allocation and each spends it as it pleases, with no coherence or common binding cause to inspire direction. They just spend it as they wish. Some will spend it on promoting a surfeit of all-Ireland connections. Indeed, it illustrates the lack of cogency in this Government that some Departments now have dedicated all-Ireland units.

Where is the economic direction of this Government? Are we seeking to tie ourselves to the fastest sinking economy in Europe: that of the Irish Republic? Or are we seeking to strengthen our ties with the sixth largest economy in the world: that of the UK? This Budget does not give us any direction as to where, economically, we are seeking to go. Therefore, it is a process and a Budget that really amounts to nothing in terms of plotting out and pointing out the economic direction that this part of the United Kingdom should be taking.

Last week and, indeed, the previous one, I asked for some specifics on the content of this Budget. That raised the ire of the Minister. I will take that risk again because I am going to ask again, tedious and tiresome as it may be, just where within this Budget we find the signals or indications of whatever became of the £800 million that was promised in the sales talk about the transfer of responsibility for policing and justice. The Minister, with great gusto, declared that he would answer that question last week. Last Monday, in answer, he said:

"the police budget now has money for a police college, the part-time Reserve gratuity fund and hearing loss claims. That is where the £800 million is." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 65, p75, col 2].

1.30 pm

Let us examine the point about the police college. On the same day last week — last Monday — the Minister's colleague Mr Poots told the House that that was a project costing £140 million. So, there is £140 million of the £800 million. The Minister said that the second component was the "part-time Reserve gratuity fund". We know that that is only £20 million. I must say that the negotiation on the Reserve gratuity fund was totally botched by those who negotiated it, when they failed to get the opt-out on taxation. That now means that that fund will be savaged by the Inland Revenue and is worth about half of what it was meant to be worth to the man or woman who is receiving it. That is down to the failure of those who negotiated it.

So, £140 million and £20 million makes £160 million. Then we have the hearing loss claims. The letter from the Prime Minister in October 2009 said that that was £12 million a year for up to five years, but, of course, it was to be paid for by the Executive handing over sellable assets. In notional terms, it is £60 million. So, £140 million, £20 million and £60 million makes £220 million and leaves us a long, long way short of the £800 million that the Minister likes to pretend was secured as part of the transfer of responsibility for policing and justice. So, where is it, Minister? It is not in the answer that you gave last week. So, let us try again this week and see whether we can get an answer to that.

What about the sellable assets in relation to the hearing loss money? Have any assets been transferred to the Treasury from the Northern Ireland Executive to offset the hearing loss money? Has any of that happened? Is any of it likely to happen? If so, when? Perhaps the Minister could tell us. Speaking of sales and assets, I ask again: what about the four bases that were handed over? What about their running costs? Where are those in this Budget? What was received for them? When are they likely to be realised?

Three debates later, the Minister does not want to answer those sorts of questions because, in truth, this is not a Budget at all in the sense that one understands it. It is, as I have described, a mere collection of budget

lines, which are very sparse in detail, that sets in motion a process whereby 11 or 12 Departments do what they please in a totally disjointed fashion. Halfway through, some may well decide to change horses. For example, we might have a sudden redirection on the spend anticipated in the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Roads Service over the A5. Of course, none of that is foreshadowed, because this Budget sets the broadest possible parameters and allows for all the changes that, according to the exigencies of the political moment, might arise.

I want to return to the issue of the funding that the Budget provides for victims' groups, because a very sad and difficult situation is unfolding in Northern Ireland for innocent victims' groups. In this Budget, there is supposed to be match funding on Peace III projects, and there is supposed to be core funding. Yet we are virtually one third of the way through the financial year, and there are groups in this Province that have seen no money since the end of March to keep themselves going.

We have staff who are unpaid and projects that have ground to a halt. Why? It is because of the double whammy of the sheer incompetence of some who administer those funds from the Community Relations Council (CRC) and others, and the bind put upon them by those who insist on audits and accounting processes that are not insisted upon for others. Hitherto, those were not insisted on, and they are beyond what volunteer groups — for many are run by volunteers — could possibly cope with. So we have the situation in which many well-known victims' groups in the Province are moneyless.

That should concern the Finance Minister. He should be making strenuous efforts, I suggest, with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to enquire as to why that blockage on funding to those vital victims' groups exists and why there has been an unfolding and apparently concerted and deliberate attempt to put some of them out of business. Of course, any financial irregularity is utterly to be pursued and utterly to be condemned. Where that has happened, Departments should certainly pursue it. However, that is no excuse for transferring the approach taken to such isolated cases to the generalised treatment of victims' groups. That, sadly, is what has been happening, particularly within the Protestant victims' sector,

and many well-known victims' groups are today in desperation.

Yes, the groups will have had meetings with junior Minister Bell and received all sorts of promises, but still no money. Sadly, a lot of this goes back to politics. It goes back to action by the First Minister's office on 18 February 2010, when, out of a fit of pique over a publication by one of the victims' groups that critiqued the Hillsborough agreement, an edict was issued to pursue that group. The product of that was the denial of funding. Yet nothing of substance has been found against that group. It cannot go on. It is the sort of thing that any Government worthy of the name would have arrested in its tracks and dealt with a long time ago.

The Budget, sadly for me, not only avoids creating a due vision for our economy and providing cogency on how we move forward, it also underpins the huge, perpetual waste in government. I mentioned it last week, but it bears repetition: the gross, incredible waste in the North/South Executive bodies. Over the four-year Budget period, £400 million is to be poured down that drain with no return. Yet, later today, we will discuss the tuition fee crisis facing families and the education sector. We are told that £40 million a year is required to plug that gap. No one knows where, if anywhere, it will come from. Yet we can find £400 million to pour down the drain of useless North/South bodies.

Unless or until Budgets in the House begin to address those realities, they will, like this one, continue to be documents of non-delivery, dysfunctional in their presentation and tawdry in their content.

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the opportunity to debate the Budget. As a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I want to voice my concerns about the Budget's implications in that area. When one examines the proposed Budget, it is evident that we are certainly in difficult financial circumstances. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) was allocated £580.4 million in the draft Budget settlement, which breaks down to £438.7 million in resources and £141.7 million in capital. Although a cut in the resource expenditure is significant, though not, perhaps, considered to be severe, the capital expenditure has dropped from £218 million in the three-year comprehensive spending review to £141.7 million for four years, which is severe. However,

the people of Northern Ireland want to know how that will impact on their lives and what the Budget will mean for them.

The first thing could be the closure of 10 libraries. That means that people in 10 rural communities will not have access to a library and may no longer have access to the Internet, and, more importantly, people could lose their jobs.

Most Members will be aware that recently there was a fire in Arthur Cottage, which caused severe damage to the ancestral home of the twenty-first American president. Given the difficult financial circumstances that we face, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure stated that the Department could not provide financial assistance for the redevelopment of that historic site.

The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure had made progress to improve sporting facilities in Northern Ireland. Three stadiums — Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park — will receive funds for redevelopment. A Member has already stated that stadium developments with a lower priority should not be given funding. The development of Casement Park, Ravenhill and Windsor Park is timely, with not only the Olympics approaching in 2012 but the Police and Fire Games in 2013 and the Commonwealth Games in 2014. Northern Ireland must have the facilities to encourage people and events to come, and it must continue to provide facilities to encourage our young athletes, so that one day we may have many more Rory McIlroys. The media attention that Rory has brought to Northern Ireland is fantastic, and we need the spotlight to shine on Northern Ireland for positive reasons to promote the economy and tourism.

It is easy to say that investment in culture should take place. However, cultural events are not only an opportunity to promote Northern Ireland, attract business investment and encourage tourism but an opportunity to promote a shared culture. Last week, we again saw rioting on the streets. Surely we should be doing our utmost to invest in the promotion of a shared cultural awareness to promote harmony and peace. We need a shared cultural awareness to establish a shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland. Will the Budget deliver that for the people of Northern Ireland? Mr Deputy Speaker, it is not even close.

Mr Wilson: I thank Members for their contributions to the Final Stage of the Budget

(No. 2) Bill for 2011-12. By necessity, as we have said time and time again during debates on the Budget, there will be some repetition. Some Members repeat what they said previously because they did not like the answer that they got, and they will probably get the same answer again. Some Members repeat what they said because they do not have anything different to say, and they will get the same response. However, I will deal with some points that were raised during the debate.

A common theme throughout the remarks was the need for a new process and the repetitive nature of the present process. Some people said that the weaknesses and the way in which information is presented do not enable them to scrutinise the accounts properly. Some people suggested that we contrived the weakness to ensure that the process is not subject to proper scrutiny. I welcome scrutiny of the Budget. We want proper scrutiny of the Budget, which is one reason why we started the review.

However, I suspect that it will not matter how much information we give to some Members; they will still complain, because, of course, they are not here to find how money is being spent. They are simply here to whinge. I will come to some of the whingers in a moment or two when I get into the substance of the comments.

1.45 pm

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Since one of the whingers wants me to give way, I will.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Minister for giving way. Is he happy with the fact that, in all probability, the review will not be completed during this mandate? Does he agree that there is a need to accelerate the review process?

Mr Wilson: I want to make something clear to the Member: it will be completed during this mandate, and, as I said in previous debates, it will probably be in place after next year's Budget. By that time, Mr Hamilton will be the one who will have to respond to the new transparent Budget, which will give Members lots more questions to ask and lots more criticism to make, and I will be very happy to hand it over to him at that stage. The process does not allow the review to be done for the next financial year, but it will be completed for the third year of the Budget.

I welcome the fact that the Committee and many Members have already made very useful suggestions. Essentially, it will not be for the Assembly and the Committees alone to make the points; we want to hear suggestions from people outside the institutions as to how they would like to see the information being presented and how we can avoid some of the repetition that is in the process at present. I look forward to that. I know that Mr Cree made that point, as did Mr Bradley, Mr Allister and Mr Murphy.

Mr Girvan referred to the PMS. I am glad that we are close to the end of that process. The money has been allocated. The small savers will be totally protected; they will get the full £20,000, and I hope that the payments will start fairly soon. That will be up to the administrator, but the money is with the Department, and we have not left it to the February process.

I welcome Mr Cree's conclusion that, having gone through all of the process, his party sees it as illogical to vote against the Budget. I do not know whether that means that we are going to get its fulsome support — somehow, I doubt it. I think that we might see the same action from its Members of going through the two Lobbies to show that they are here but not actually voting for it. It will be a bit of a disappointment if they are not able to endorse the Budget, given that part of the reason why we are facing the current problems with the Budget is the support that his party gave to the Conservatives at the last election and, as a result of that, the £4 billion cut that was imposed for the next four years. I thought that they would at least have had the grace to accept that we have tried to manage the situation that they have created for us as best we could and would have given us some support for that. However, we will see; maybe we will get their support when the time comes.

Mr McDonnell is not in his seat, but may I say that of the contributions from the SDLP, I felt that his were, at least, the most constructive. Comments went quickly downhill after his contribution. They went from constructive to repetition of the past errors, to drivel, which, to be frank, became almost incomprehensible towards the end.

Let me deal with some of the points that Mr McDonnell made. He made the very important point that the Budget should be about creating economic opportunities for the future. We are in the middle of a recession. What is the Budget

trying to do, within the limits that have been imposed on us, and what has it done to try to improve economic opportunities? He talked about the need to spend on infrastructure, and he is right. The fact that we moved £256 million from current spending to capital spending, against a 40% cut in our capital budget from central government, was an indication that we sought to try to fill some of that gap.

By the fourth year of this Budget, we will be spending £1.4 billion on infrastructure and capital investment, which is equivalent to the long-term trend that there would have been over the lifetime of this Assembly, the previous Assembly and the Assembly before that. That is recognition in the Budget that, despite what some other Members said about there being no strategic direction, we have understood the importance of infrastructure to building up the economy and making this a place where private sector investors can come knowing that they have the ability to then do business. Whether that infrastructure is roads, railways, factory-building or broadband — whatever it happens to be — we have sought to provide additional resources for that. As well as that, we are, of course, looking at the redundant resources, infrastructure and buildings that government might have, which we no longer have use of or are not fully using. We are looking at how we can realise cash from those, again, to put into capital investment.

He also raised the issue of jobs. If you look at the allocation that has been made to DETI, you will see that Invest Northern Ireland is convinced that, with that allocation, it will be able to create 20,000 jobs over the Budget period 2011-15. Some of those jobs will be created very quickly by the £19 million that has been given for short-term jobs that can be brought online very quickly.

He also spoke about the importance of money spent on research and development. Only this week, we have had two very important examples of that. On Wednesday, I had the opportunity to visit FG Wilson in my constituency. It has spent £26 million on an engineering centre of excellence, in which generators can be tested for emissions, noise etc, and problems can be analysed. The centre will look at how generators can be built and run more efficiently, how they can become lower-maintenance, how they can use less fuel, etc. By keeping the research and development in Northern Ireland, that anchors

the manufacturing jobs in Northern Ireland. DETI played an important part in ensuring that that research and development facility was developed and, in turn, it will anchor thousands of other jobs.

The other good news last week was about Bombardier. Bombardier has now secured hundreds of millions of pounds worth of orders for its new jet. The carbon fibre was developed here in Northern Ireland and the research and development was done here in Northern Ireland. As a result, we have secured the manufacturing of wings, etc, which will secure thousands of jobs in engineering. Again, that emphasises the importance of being not just a manufacturing base but a place in which products can be researched and developed. Therefore, we get the benefit of then manufacturing that product when it comes onto the market.

I remember Arlene Foster being criticised because of the money that she wanted to give Bombardier to develop the C Series. At one stage, she got a lot of criticism and was asked why she was giving Bombardier so much money. This illustrates that there was far-sightedness on her part. She saw and believed that the potential that the firm suggested was there could secure jobs in the long-term future.

Mr McDonnell also mentioned food production in Northern Ireland. I am meeting the Northern Ireland food and drink industry within the next week to discuss the potential for new investment in that industry.

I come then to Mrs Cochrane's contribution. She talked about rebuilding the economy and the need to live within the Budget, about it being important for Committees to make sure that savings delivery plans have been abided by, and about ensuring that Departments spend money as they promised. She talked about the need to rebuild the economy, and especially about the role of tourism. I repeat that I share her views about what happened in east Belfast last week. I was incensed over the weekend at the excuses that were given for the interface violence that marred the news from Northern Ireland last week. People always look for someone to blame rather than look at those who perpetrated the violence.

The Member will know that East Belfast used to be my constituency and that there has been significant investment in the area, such as the new housing around the bottom of the

Newtownards Road. In fact, I was recently engaged with other Members in working with Habitat for Humanity on houses in Madrid Street. I remember when Madrid Street and Thistle Court were wastelands; now they are thriving communities, and new investment is going into them.

Some people think that investment only goes to community groups. A lot of money has gone into community activity, but there has been investment in schools and housing, investment by the voluntary sector and investment in the Skainos project at the bottom of the Newtownards Road. For people to say that, somehow or other, these things happen because the Government do not give money to those areas and that there has been no investment in communities is a cop-out. Such things happen because bad people do bad things. As a result, it makes it much more difficult for those of us who want to improve the situation in Northern Ireland.

The Member talked about co-operation across Departments; Mr Allister made a meal of that, as did Mr Bradley. I want to address that issue very forcibly. The idea that allocating money to the Department of Education, the Health Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and all the other Departments somehow reinforces a silo mentality is, quite honestly, one of the most infantile arguments that I have ever heard perpetrated in this Assembly. We allocate money to Departments because government is organised in Departments. That is the structure of our government, and to say that because we allocate money into all those silos we do not have joined-up government bears no resemblance to the facts.

I could cite plenty of examples, but I will give just one. Take the regeneration of town centres: the Department for Social Development spent money creating a master plan for town centres and picked out a number of vulnerable towns; it put money into key projects in those town centres to regenerate them. In the Budget, I announced that my Department would spend money on giving a small business rates relief. The idea of the small business rates relief was to ensure that small, vulnerable businesses, especially those in town centres, got a reduction in their overheads so that we could make it easier for them to survive.

The Department for Employment and Learning runs training schemes for retailers who work in town centres to ensure that they become more viable and more vibrant. The Department of the Environment does the same. Roads Service looks at schemes in town centres, such as traffic calming, and seeks to spruce them up, by environmental or other schemes.

That is just one example of where money goes into different pots but is not spent in some kind of silo way. There is co-operation between Departments to look at what can be done to make sure that money is spent effectively and individual sums of money are spent in a way that gives greater benefit than the individual sums of money added together. There are lots of other examples across government that we could quote.

2.00 pm

We have to get away from this nonsense. It really is juvenile for people to simply poke at what the Administration do, instead of recognising that some good work is done and that good work is a result of innovative ideas from public servants, officials, communities, businesses and politicians. We seek to spend money effectively by looking at those ways of doing so.

Mrs Cochrane also raised the issue of co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and talked about the work of the North/South Ministerial Council. Actually, a lot of that co-operation never takes place at North/South Ministerial Council level at all. In fact — this is a theme that I come back to time and again, and it is one of the areas where I happen to be in some agreement with Mr Allister — I would like to see a reduction in a lot of the unnecessary structures that have been set up to bring about co-operation between Ministers and Departments in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. I believe that that can be done much more effectively by Ministers who really want to get value for money in both jurisdictions working together. There is really no need for a lot of the architecture, but we have to live with it.

I have sought to ensure that there are as many efficiencies as possible to try to cut costs, as has the Finance Minister in the Irish Republic. A lot of co-operation takes place at departmental level between Ministers. Actually, there is no provision in the North/South structure for a lot of those things to happen because they are

outside its remit. However, that does not mean that they should not be pursued. Indeed, in the margins of those meetings, other Ministers and I often have meetings with our counterparts from the Republic to ensure that we get value for money. That in no way comprises my unionism. It does, however, make good economic sense at a time of economic austerity.

I will now deal with Mr McLaughlin's points. He talked about the approach that challenged the Assembly as far as the Budget was concerned and the need to supplement the block grant by looking for new revenue and efficiencies. I say that all the time as well, and, when you say it like that, it seems to roll off the tongue very easily. However, the truth of the matter is that new revenues and more efficient ways of delivering government in Northern Ireland will represent tough political decisions. As soon as we start to talk about raising new revenue, there will be some group who will be affected by that and will not want to pay, so it will lobby against it. As soon as we start to talk about more efficient ways of delivering government in Northern Ireland, we will hear about the implications for employment or whatever, and people will lobby against it. We must seek those opportunities, but they will not be penalty kicks and will not be easy to deliver on all of the time.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

As I said, the SDLP contribution started to go downhill after Mr McDonnell made his contribution. Mr Bradley started off in the normal way by complaining about the whole process. I could have written and, in fact, delivered his speech for him, for goodness' sake. However, there was one interesting thing at the very start of his speech, when he talked about how the SDLP had engaged fully in the Budget process and had brought forward ideas. Indeed, he even suggested that we had accepted some of those ideas. The constant theme of SDLP Members during the earlier debates on the Budget was that they would vote against it because they were not allowed to play any part in it and were blocked out and ignored. However, Mr Bradley has now told the House that not only did the SDLP engage fully in the process but it had some of its ideas accepted.

Mr Speaker, are you going to intervene on me? I think that you are.

Mr Speaker: No, I will allow the Minister to continue.

Mr Wilson: Thank you. I think that we are already finding that, by its own admission, the rationale that the SDLP had for opposing the Budget is beginning to unravel. The SDLP played a part. We could query, as I have, how useful some of its ideas were, but Mr Bradley is right to say that some of those ideas were taken on board and, as he also indicated, his party engaged fully in the process.

Mr Bradley said that he was unclear about what happened to the £1.6 billion of revenue raising. He suggested that we had had only £900 million of that, and he asked what happened to the other £0.7 billion. Of course, the truth of the matter is that some aspirational forms of revenue raising were included in that figure. Indeed, he will know all about aspirational revenue raising: his party's document was full of them, and some of the ideas were not very practical at all. Many ideas amounting to issues worth between £1.6 billion and £1.8 billion were brought to the Budget review group. Many of those ideas were rejected because they were not workable; some were put on the back-burner to see whether they were workable; and others are still being pursued to see how practical they are. However, a total of £900 million was raised.

Mr Bradley reverted to asking whether that money was new money. I am not too sure what he means by that. If he is asking whether it is money that we would not have had, had we not put those recommendations into the Budget, it is all new money. It may come from traditional sources, such as selling assets. However, those are not assets that were sold before or belong to someone else, unlike some of the ideas in the SDLP's document. The assets concerned are ones that we have and that we decided that we were going to dispose of because we could put the money from them to better use by furthering some of the objectives that we have set for ourselves. Some of it is new money in so far as it is additional money that we are collecting from rates, and some of it was previously unavailable to us because we are taking it from sources, such as the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, from whom we have not collected before. However, it is all new money, albeit from some of the sources that we have drawn on in the past to raise that kind of revenue.

Mr Bradley also raised the issue of progress on the Programme for Government. That is something for OFMDFM, and I think that that will be coming forward. He also raised the issue

of the £4 billion that should be available for investment in Northern Ireland in years 5 and 6 of the Budget. That has now been referred to the joint ministerial council as a dispute that we have with the Government. They are likely to say that they have provided Budget allocations only for the next four years, but it has been fed into that dispute mechanism.

Finally, Mr Bradley raised the issues of EYF and NAMA. I will meet the Treasury Minister tomorrow to discuss proposals for EYF, and, later this afternoon, I will meet representatives of NAMA to discuss the issues that he raised about the way that it treats things in Northern Ireland.

I will now move on to the points that Joe Byrne raised, and, as I said, the contributions from SDLP Members started to slip down the hill after Dr McDonnell's. That started with a statement from Mr Byrne, which I wrote down so that I did not get it wrong. He said that the Budget created no "stimulus for the local economy". I know that he was not here in the last mandate, but I would have thought that, before coming off with what I can only describe advisedly as drivel, he would at least have sought to acquaint himself with the facts of the Budget.

Over the next four years, albeit against a background of a 40% reduction, we have a considerable investment programme, culminating in £1.4 billion being spent in year 4, which will bring us back to the long-term trend. In the Budget, we have allocated money to DETI to create 20,000 jobs. We have the small business rate relief. We are seeking to help the manufacturing industry by keeping the cap on manufacturing rates at 30%. We are putting money into building new schools. We are putting money into the capital programme for health. It is absolute nonsense that there is no stimulus for the local economy in this Budget, and the Member knows it. He should have thought about it. I am not too sure what he meant, but he then went on to criticise the size of the subvention that we get from London. Maybe he wanted even more cuts, but it was certainly not clear. He complained about the subvention that we get from London but said that we were too dependent on the public sector. Does he want more cuts? Perhaps he will tell me now.

Mr Byrne: I was not criticising the fact that we get £8 billion; I was actually showing some gratitude for that. The reality is that the regional economy has to be reshaped and reconfigured.

Most economic commentators would expect us to say that we want to make the private sector more productive and become less dependent on the public sector. That is the gist of what I was saying.

Mr Wilson: Again, I am not clear. If he wants us to be less dependent on the public sector, does he want more public sector spending cuts? Is that what he is saying? It is totally unclear what he means.

All I can say is that this Budget seeks to rebalance the economy. It seeks to ensure that we put in place money to spend on infrastructure to encourage private sector investment. It puts money in place to create jobs, especially in the private sector and not the public sector, to try to change the balance. It tries to use what limited tax powers we have to encourage the private sector of the economy. The Member talked about wanting a better way and about rebalancing the economy, but all we got were the words. There were no suggestions for how it might be done.

Michelle Gildernew talked about the June monitoring round and deplored the fact that no application had been made for specific projects such as —

Ms Gildernew: Music therapy.

Mr Wilson: Yes, music therapy. Sorry. That was below the de minimis level. Therefore, the Health Department would have had the ability to move the money around and would not have had to make a bid for it. However, as I said, there was not a great deal of money available during the June monitoring round.

Mr Eastwood gave a list of things that he wanted money to be spent on. He said that the Budget will not deliver and does not protect public sector jobs. He did not recognise the fact that we froze public sector wages to try to save about 1,800 public sector jobs. He said that the Budget makes no real attempt to buffer the economy against the recession. He said that there is no strategic job creation or money for new schools. He went on and on and on about things that we should spend money on but gave no ideas about where the money should come from. I suppose that that is the type of bankruptcy that we have come to expect from some in the SDLP.

I now turn to the Elijah of the Assembly, who has not bowed the knee to Baal and wishes

to slay the prophets of Baal during his term here. I have to say that the sword that he uses to do the slaying is becoming more and more blunt every time he wields it. We get the same old arguments, and he hits the same old wall with them. He will not get anywhere with those arguments, because, of course, they are simply a repetition of things that do not have any substance.

2.15 pm

I have dealt with the issue of each Department getting its allocation and this Budget being based on a silo mentality. I hope that I have dealt with that through the example that I have given, and, if Members wish, I can give other examples.

Mr Allister said that he was going to be tedious and tiresome; he will do tedium and tiresomeness with great relish. We will all get very tired, very soon, of some of his arguments. For the third time, he asks, "Where is Gordon Brown's £800 million?". I have said to Mr Allister and I repeat that he is looking for some kind of Mr Bean accountancy that shows that, on 15 June, Gordon Brown gave Peter Robinson £800 million and, on 16 June, Peter Robinson did that, that, that and that with it. If he is looking for that kind of transparency in the accounts, I must tell him that that is not the way in which government accounts are done. However, let me repeat it, so that he knows.

Mr Allister talks about botched negotiations. At least the DUP got into negotiations, rather than standing on the sidelines throwing tantrums. We got involved in seeking additional money for policing and justice in Northern Ireland so that, when those powers were devolved, we did not hit an economic crisis. The money is allocated: it is for the police college, the part-time gratuity and the hearing loss settlement. Incidentally, in presenting the sums to the Assembly, Mr Allister could not even get it right. The Department of Justice had to find the first £12 million each year. Anything after that — the bill is likely to be £400 million — was to be provided by the Treasury. If Mr Allister is querying the sums, he should at least get the facts right.

The Department of Justice has also been able to draw down money to deal with terrorism over the next four or five years. Rather than having to make an application on a year-on-year basis, that £200 million has now been made available to the Department. If Mr Allister wants

to know where the money is, I can tell him that it has been allocated for pensions, equal pay, the hearing loss settlement, the police college and dealing with terrorism. That money makes policing more effective. Furthermore — this will be joy to his ears — money has been allocated for the legal aid bill in Northern Ireland. The money is all there, that is how it is allocated, and that is how I prefer the information to be presented, according to how it is spent and the impact that it will have.

Mr Allister: At the third attempt, the Minister has added new budget lines to his explanation of the £800 million, but they still come nowhere near £800 million. One hundred million pounds is to be spent on the police college, £20 million on the Reserve gratuity, and a figure will be spent on the hearing loss settlement. The Minister must not have read the Prime Minister's letter: it clearly states that anything above the £60 million — that is, above £12 million per annum for five years — is met through access to the reserve. Access to the reserve was never spun as part of the £800 million. The Minister has still not told the House where the £800 million is. He may have added a few lines today, but he is well short of the £800 million. He knows that the £800 million was a con on the community, and he cannot tabulate it. He cannot give it, which is why he tries to bluster his way out of it.

Mr Wilson: I am not going to bluster my way out of it. To make his figures add up, Mr Allister has already changed his mind. When he spoke not so long ago, he had £140 million for the college. Now it is down to £100 million, in a period of about 10 minutes. If anyone needs to get his head round the figures, it is Mr Allister, not me. I have given a list and examples of where the money has gone.

The important point is that, had we used the strategy that Mr Allister and his friends wanted, which was to stand and yap on the sidelines without getting involved in negotiations, we would not have had one penny of that £800 million. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: That £800 million is now available to be spent on security in Northern Ireland —

Mr Allister: Where?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: At the risk of being tedious and tiresome, he asks, "Where?". I will go through

again where the money has gone: the police college, the hearing loss claims, the part-time Reserve, dealing with terrorism and pay equality.

Mr Allister: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: He also raised the issue of victims' groups. I find it odd that anyone would want public money to be spent in a way that is not accountable. He spoke about transparency in the accounts of the Assembly. However, when we seek to make victims' groups accountable and transparent, Mr Allister seems not to like the kind of scrutiny to which one or two of those groups, which happen to be closely allied to him, are subjected.

Mr Allister: Is that why they are being victimised?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: No. He asked that question from a sedentary position. First, they are not being victimised. Secondly, the groups were selected not by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister or the Executive but on the basis of a risk analysis exercise conducted by CRC. That exercise was carried out on all victims' groups that are in receipt of funding.

Mr Bell: I thank the Finance Minister for giving way on that specific point. I have met a number of victims' groups and compared their funding from last year with the funding allocated for this year. In all the cases that I considered, this year's funding is substantially greater than it was last year, and, in some cases, it is tens of thousands of pounds greater. Will the Minister reflect that, under direct rule, the money allocated to victims was less than £5 million, whereas this year, under the House's Budget, it is in the region of £12 million?

Mr Wilson: I appreciate what the junior Minister said, although I suspect that it will not make one whit of difference to the arguments that we will hear time and time again in the House. The arguments that Mr Allister will put forward will simply be ones that he happens to think justify his opposition to anything done by the Administration. Often, they will be arguments that he just happens to make up. He has made it clear that his *raison d'être* is to level criticism, justified or not, time and time again. I am happy to take criticism when we have done something wrong.

First, we have a four-year Budget, which is something that no other Administration in any part of the United Kingdom, apart from the Westminster Government, has. Scotland and

Wales did not get it, but we did. That Budget seeks to grow the economy in the face of a world recession and to rebalance that economy to try to improve the private sector. We have a Budget that seeks to protect public services, even in the face of swingeing £4,000 million cuts. It seeks to be innovative in raising new money to try to fill some of the gaps created by the reductions that came from Westminster. We have a Budget that is a result of listening to interest groups who told us what needs to be done to regenerate town centres, to stimulate employment, to get training going, to get research and development going and to help the construction industry. We have sought to tailor the Budget to those ends. That is an achievement, especially given that it had to be done in a mandatory five-party coalition and against the economic background that we had.

Those in the SDLP and the smaller parties can criticise because they do not have to take any responsibility. The larger, responsible parties in the Assembly could not leave Northern Ireland without a Budget. Public services would have collapsed had we done that. Those who, I suspect, will indulge themselves by going through the "No" Lobby at the end of the debate will do so in the sure knowledge that others will take the responsible decisions to take Northern Ireland forward. The irresponsible can traipse through the "No" Lobby. I hope that they hang their heads in shame as they do. They pass on the responsibility of keeping public services and public finances going, keeping the economy running and looking at a vision for the economy in Northern Ireland to others who will take the flak. Some things in the Budget are unpopular; that is the nature of a Budget that has less money than in previous years.

There is a stark choice between those prepared to be responsible politicians in Northern Ireland and those who simply want always to say the populist thing or use situations such as this to score cheap political points against their opponents. Of course you will do that in debate; that is what debate is about. However, when making a decision as important as how money is allocated, we have to recognise that the best possible job was done in difficult circumstances. For that reason I commend the Budget Bill to the House and look forward to Royal Assent.

Mr Speaker: As we come to Question Time at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. After Question Time, we will put the Question on the Budget.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Question Nos 1, 8, 9 and 13 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Victims' Groups: Audit

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the criteria used to determine why some victims and survivors groups were subject to a risk-based audit in relation to the establishment of a new Victims and Survivors Service. (AQO 180/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, let me make it clear that there is no relation between the risk-based audit that is currently being conducted and the establishment of a new Victims and Survivors Service. Those are two unique areas of work, and neither impacts directly on the other. In relation to the audit, groups were selected on the basis of a rigorously conducted risk-analysis exercise conducted by the Community Relations Council on all victims' groups in receipt of core and/or strategic support funding from the council at that time.

Four areas were reviewed: the value of funding received; the level of financial controls; the organisational governance arrangements; and the extent of multiple sources of funding. I am sure that the Member will understand that it would not be appropriate to identify the groups selected for the funding verification and control process while the audit is still being carried out. Once the findings have been presented to our Department, any weaknesses in systems or controls that might be identified will be addressed.

Work is progressing in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to establish the new Victims and Survivors Service. We are still working to our previously agreed two-year time frame of April 2010 to April 2012. The new service will provide support for all victims and survivors, those who belong to victims'

groups and those who do not. Our aim is to establish a service that will listen and be responsive to the needs of victims and survivors. Support will be provided to victims and survivors based on identified and agreed need.

The time frame for the establishment of the service will not be impacted by the ongoing audit. We continue to be committed to delivering the highest level of support and services to victims, and that is evidenced by the amount of funding in that area. We have planned provision of £50 million to meet the needs of victims and survivors over the Budget period 2011-15.

Mr Nesbitt: I declare an interest as a former commissioner for the victims and survivors of the conflict. I thank the Minister for his answer. I wonder if, when he allocated an additional £3 million to victims in the 2007 comprehensive spending review, he imagined that the period would elapse without the service having come into being, that groups would largely feel that they will have no future once the service does arrive, and that the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund would stop processing new applications and would have a backlog of some 1,500. What does he intend to do about that?

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member that it is one inquiry, not multiple questions.

Mr M McGuinness: Work is progressing in OFMDFM to establish the new service. We are still working to our previously agreed time frame of 2010-12. The new service will provide support for all victims and survivors, and we continue to be committed to delivering the highest level of support and services to victims. In fact, we are still awaiting the completion of the comprehensive needs assessment by the victims' commissioners. That is vital to identifying and developing the support necessary for victims and to the work of the service. I would have thought that the Member, given that he was previously involved with the commission, would have understood the difference between the audit and the establishment of the service.

In relation to the Northern Ireland Memorial fund, before releasing further funding to it, we need to ensure full accountability and value for public money. We now have the necessary authorisations in place to confirm the memorial fund's budget for 2011-12, which will be approximately £3 million. Officials are currently working on a letter of offer for 2011-12, and

we expect that to be with the fund very shortly. When it accepts the terms and conditions of the letter of offer, further funding will be released to the memorial fund, and that will enable it to issue letters of award to those individuals whose applications have been fully assessed.

Last autumn, we approved the memorial fund's proposals for moving to a new individual-needs-based approach to provide financial support to victims and survivors. The memorial fund launched that new approach on 8 November 2010 and so far, it has distributed over £3.5 million. A total of £4.4 million was provided through the fund in 2011, which was more than double the allocation in 2008-09.

It is true that the memorial fund received a higher than anticipated number of applications. That put serious pressure on the fund's budget, which, ultimately, placed a strain on the Department's overall budget for victims and survivors. In light of that funding pressure, we wrote to the memorial fund on 29 March 2011, asking it to close its grant schemes to further applications from 18 April 2011, to facilitate a full consideration of the grant schemes and the new approach. Letters were sent to every previous applicant to the fund and to all victims' groups to ensure that news of the 18 April closing date was conveyed to everyone and that nobody missed out. Those issues are being dealt with, and, over the coming period, we hope that any outstanding applications will be expedited.

Mr Speaker: I remind Ministers about their time limits under Standing Orders.

Ms Ruane: An féidir leis an LeasChéad Aire insint dúinn cá mhéad airgid a thug a Roinn don memorial fund do Thuaisceart na hÉireann? Will the deputy First Minister outline the funding that has been made available for victims through the NI Memorial Fund?

Mr M McGuinness: I understand that this issue has been in the media recently. I know that people have, understandably, been frustrated by the length of time that it has taken to release funding via the memorial fund. I have already explained why that is the case. However, I am, again, very pleased to confirm that we now have the necessary authorisations in place for the memorial fund's budget for 2011-12, which will amount to approximately £3 million. Over £3.5 million has been distributed so far under the new needs-based process that was introduced in November 2010. Along with the £4.4 million

that was provided through the fund in 2010-11, that is more than double the allocation in 2008-09. Officials are currently working on a letter of offer, which we expect to be with the fund very shortly. When the fund accepts the terms and conditions of the letter of offer, further funding will be released that will enable it to issue letters of awards to those individuals whose applications have been fully assessed.

Mr Eastwood: Why has the deputy First Minister's Department not responded to several letters drafted by the victims' commissioners? Given the importance of those issues, will his Department respond at its earliest convenience?

Mr M McGuinness: It is not true to suggest that we have not responded to letters from the victims' commissioners. In fact, the First Minister and I will meet the victims' commissioners later this week.

Childcare Strategy

3. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the development of a childcare strategy. (AQO 181/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to take this question.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat. In the recent Budget settlement, £12 million was allocated — £3 million a year — towards providing support for a childcare strategy. The development and successful implementation of a childcare strategy calls for collaborative working across Departments and agencies and with families and other stakeholders. Strengthening and building on the existing provision and services, OFMDFM has begun to develop proposals, through the work of the ministerial-led subcommittee on children and young people, for consideration by the Assembly and the Executive. OFMDFM commissioned a policy and economic appraisal of the options for the childcare strategy. That report, which has detailed a range of essential and desirable actions to support a 10-year strategy, will inform the development of such a strategy as well as the Executive's decision on how the £3 million a year will be allocated.

Mrs McKeivitt: Can the junior Minister say what representations have been made to her Department on behalf of childcare groups that were part of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) pilot? When will new resources be open for applications from those groups?

Ms M Anderson: Representations will be made to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on behalf of those involved in the DARD pilot. That said, we have engaged with a number of groups and organisations to develop the childcare strategy. That work is continuing, and will continue into the future.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for her answers so far. What progress is being made on agreeing a lead Department for the delivery of the childcare strategy? That, to date, seems to have been a stumbling block.

Ms M Anderson: I understand the Member's concern, and he is absolutely right to point out that we previously reported to the House that no Department had yet agreed to take the lead role in taking forward the childcare strategy. In the light of that position, OFMDFM has agreed to take the initial lead in order to ensure momentum and alignment with other policies that will impact directly on children and young people. It is still our desire to see a Department, or Departments, take on that lead role.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I congratulate the junior Minister on her appointment, and I welcome her to her first Question Time. When does she envisage the money for the childcare strategy hitting the ground? Furthermore, when will actions from it commence for groups?

Ms M Anderson: I thank the Member for those comments. I am extremely conscious of the fact that the Member has been acutely interested in the childcare strategy process. The Member will be aware that previous OFMDFM Ministers, through the ministerial subcommittee for children and young people, commissioned an economic appraisal of the strategic options for childcare. Based on the subcommittee's report, thankfully, we were able to secure £12 million in the Budget negotiations.

Since taking up my post, I have sought to ensure that any decisions that we take align with other policies, ensuring particularly that we maximise the impact for those most in need

in our society. With that in mind, it is clear that there is synergy between the childcare strategy and the actions flowing from the child poverty strategy, which is another area of concern for the Member. I am sure that all Members will want us to take our time to get it right to ensure that, at all stages, the delivery of the childcare strategy produces the best possible results for all children and young people.

Mr Agnew: Does the junior Minister agree that, in putting the economy first, as it is predicted the Programme for Government will state, we have to look at issues such as the childcare strategy, because economic and social issues are not separate? Indeed, the needs of workers must be considered as well as those of businesses.

Ms M Anderson: In line with the requirement of the Child Poverty Act 2010, OFMDFM consulted on the proposed strategy with local public bodies and children's organisations working with or representing children and other stakeholders, particularly those working in the field to which the Member referred. During the formal consultation period, which ended on 6 February 2010, a series of related events were held in places such as Belfast, Ballymena, Newry, Derry, Enniskillen and Omagh.

The local child poverty strategy was published on 24 March 2011, and it is hoped that a meeting of the ministerial-led poverty and social inclusion stakeholder forum will take place shortly to allow members to consider a first draft strategy and associated delivery plan, which will be very important for the process and will continue our work with colleagues in other Departments to prepare a monitoring framework that allows progress on eradicating child poverty to be measured. Therefore, Members can see that a strategy has been developed; we have a first draft of the associated action plan; and we are preparing a monitoring framework so that we can measure outcomes, which will be very important to ensuring that we deliver on the childcare strategy.

Rathlin Island: Executive

4. **Mr Storey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they have taken in relation to holding an Executive meeting on Rathlin Island. (AQO 182/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Earlier this year, we received an invitation to hold an Executive meeting on Rathlin Island. Although pressures on ministerial diaries have so far dictated that the Executive have usually met in Stormont Castle, we keep arrangements for meetings, including their location, under review. We recognise the potential benefits of holding meetings in other locations, and we will certainly give full consideration to that and other invitations in our forward planning.

I know that a number of Ministers in the current Executive have independently visited the island at the request of residents. Indeed, I believe that my colleague the Minister for Regional Development, who has lead responsibility for taking forward the Executive's Rathlin Island policy and action plan, intends to visit the island in the near future. The Executive are also fully committed to implementing their Rathlin Island policy and the action plan that stemmed from it. The Executive recognise the particular challenges of island life and are committed to helping to support a vibrant Rathlin community and to increasing the involvement of islanders in developing the policies and projects that will improve conditions for them. I understand that islanders have indicated that they are broadly content with developments so far.

2.45 pm

Mr Storey: I thank the deputy First Minister for underlining the importance of ensuring that the island of Rathlin is properly serviced by the Administration and Departments in Northern Ireland. Will he ensure that, when it comes to implementation, OFMDFM will play an active role in making sure that there is delivery? We have had a lot of commitment in the action plan. We now need to see delivery on the ground that will benefit the people of the island of Rathlin.

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I recognise the importance of giving as much support as we possibly can to the islanders. Those of us who have been to the island — I went there last year — appreciate and understand the islanders' particular exceptional difficulties, which people here on the mainland do not have. From our perspective, recognising the challenges that the islanders face, and recognising that those challenges are different from those faced here, means that they need to be addressed in a different way.

The Rathlin policy was drafted to develop a vibrant Rathlin community and increase the involvement of islanders in developing policies and projects to improve conditions for them while protecting the island's unique environment. The policy has four strategic aims to ensure efficient and equitable access to services and sustain an effective island community. The aims are to enhance the community involvement; to improve the provision of public services for islanders; to advance policies for a sustainable island community; and to conserve the island's exceptional environmental heritage. The Rathlin Island policy was endorsed by the Executive on 25 February 2010.

That is a very clear commitment from the Executive. A number of ministerial colleagues from the previous Executive were involved in visits to the island. We are intent on keeping up that level of contact and communication. It is also gratifying to know that those who speak on behalf of the islanders are very connected to all the work that we are involved in and, on the whole, are satisfied that they are getting a fair deal.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the practical logistics of holding an Executive meeting outside the confines of the Stormont estate?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that everybody here appreciates the practical difficulties that surround the prospect of Executive meetings being held outside Stormont Castle. Obviously, it is much easier to hold meetings there. There is a much tighter network around the castle and these buildings for ministerial colleagues, most of whom are based in their Departments in Belfast. However, there have been occasions in the past on which Executive meetings were held outside Belfast. As part of the first Administration from, I think, December 1999 to October 2002, I believe that at least one meeting was held in the city of Derry, which we all attended. That was a logistical nightmare for a lot of officials who serviced that meeting. However, it is something that we will consider. Now that the suggestion has been made by the Member for North Antrim, many Members will be very tempted to send in letters of offer for their particular areas. Given that there are 18 constituencies, that represents a big challenge.

Mr Speaker: Members need to rise quickly in their place if they want to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Swann: I was standing.

Mr Speaker: You have to continually stand. *[Interruption.]* Order. I have continually said to Members from all sides that you need to continually rise in your place. Standing once and then hoping to get in to ask a supplementary question will not get you in. This time, however, I will allow the Member some latitude.

Mr Swann: Thank you for your latitude, Mr Speaker. If the deputy First Minister were to take the Executive Committee to Rathlin, which I would fully endorse because it is a great part of north Antrim, would he make use of the facilities that were previously not made available to members of the Royal Family in their visit to the island?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member is a new kid on the block, and I know that that issue is of great interest to him and many other Members. But to ask me to become embroiled in that one is a bridge too far.

Child Abuse

5. **Mr Brady** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress that has been made by the task force on historical institutional child abuse. (AQO 183/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The inter-departmental task force for historical institutional abuse has now completed its consultation with victims and survivors and with other key stakeholder groups. It is currently engaged in scoping out options on the nature of an inquiry. The task force will submit its recommendations to the Executive prior to the summer recess. As part of that scoping process, the task force has been drawing upon and learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions. The task force has also conducted a series of consultation meetings with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse. Those took place in Armagh, Belfast and Derry in March 2011. The task force has also received written responses on the consultation. That information is currently being collated and analysed, and we wish to ensure that the way forward will be the right one for all those affected by that extremely difficult and very sensitive matter.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. What support is currently available to victims of institutional abuse?

Mr M McGuinness: In our meetings with victims and survivors, they indicated to us that they need support in trauma counselling and support; housing advice; information on benefit entitlement; advice on records search; information on training and employment support and opportunities; and PSNI referrals. With those points in mind, a page has been developed on the NI Direct website and an information leaflet has been produced, which contain key government contacts. In addition, OFMDFM officials are exploring in the Department and in other Departments how money can be made available to meet immediate needs. That includes providing support to facilitate victims and survivors' engagement with the task force, support mechanisms for victims and access to government services. As all Members will appreciate, it is an extremely sensitive subject and one that represents a major priority for the Executive.

Last year, the First Minister and I met a group of survivors, including Margaret McGuckin, who, I am pleased to say, is in the Gallery today. We were deeply affected by what we heard in the testimonies that were presented to us. We fully understood the importance of the need of victims and survivors to be believed and that that was a top priority for them. I can say without fear of contradiction that the First Minister and I believed their stories, as many others in our society do. That area of work is hugely important to us, and we intend to proceed as quickly as possible, in conjunction with the victims and survivors, to ensure that final decisions taken on the nature of the inquiry absolutely satisfies them.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister outlined the considerable volume of work that the task force has undertaken, and his response alluded to the need to acknowledge the victims of the past. Does he also acknowledge that there is a need to ensure that the perpetrators co-operate fully and that they are made amenable before the law for the deeds that they have done in the past?

Mr M McGuinness: On the issue of historical institutional abuse, the First Minister and I and, indeed, many other politicians have made it absolutely clear that victims and survivors need to be acknowledged and supported. We have encouraged all of them that, if they have information, they should come forward and present that information to the PSNI. Many of

them do have information and may not have had the confidence to come forward thus far.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for their personal commitment to this issue. The deputy First Minister acknowledged the needs and wishes of those who have survived institutional abuse in this region. Their desired shape of and model for an inquiry must be kept to the forefront of our minds. Will he confirm that he believes that an independent state-led inquiry is the bare minimum that this House could offer survivors as a process through which to find the truth and justice that they have, so far, been denied?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that the Member knows that the interdepartmental task force met for the first time on 4 January 2011. A further four meetings have been held to date. Over the past five months, the task force has been scoping out options on the nature of an inquiry. That involves drawing upon and learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions to bring forward recommendations that best meet the needs and circumstances of victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse here. To date, the task force has met with officials in the South and in Scotland, Amnesty International, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, children's rights organisations, the PSNI, and organisations that deal with victims' issues. Officials have continued to meet with representatives of victims' and survivors' groups through a number of specific consultation meetings that were held in March 2011.

This is all a work in progress, but the First Minister and I are absolutely dedicated to ensuring that, whatever final decisions are taken on the nature of an inquiry, it will be of total satisfaction to the people to whom we have been speaking and the representatives of those who have been abused down the years.

Budget Review Group

6. **Mr Molloy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Budget review group. (AQO 184/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The Budget review group recommenced its work at a meeting on 15 June 2011 and will continue to meet during this Assembly term. All parties in the Executive continue to be involved in the group's

discussions. Other Ministers are invited to attend if an issue relating to their Department arises. The ministerial Budget review group met several times before Christmas as part of developing the draft Budget and to consider a number of important cross-cutting strategic issues that are key components of Budget 2011-15, including public sector pay constraint, additional revenue-raising options, additional means of leveraging funds and measures to reduce bureaucracy. The Budget review group is continuing to explore potential additional options for revenue raising to be taken forward in the medium to longer term. The group will also take forward the review of arm's-length bodies so that recommendations can be made to the Executive.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the update. I know that the Budget review group is looking at asset management. Will the Minister give us an update on what is happening on that aspect of its work?

Mr M McGuinness: The Executive agreed in January 2011 to establish a central asset management unit. Its range of functions includes developing with Departments an overarching corporate asset management strategy for public sector assets and assisting Departments to develop asset management plans. The unit will work to deliver the additional capital receipts of £100 million as agreed by the Executive in the final Budget, of which £10 million is to be delivered this year. That is a very challenging target in the current climate, and we will look to the unit to provide imaginative and innovative solutions to release resources for new investment.

The asset management unit will also work to realise potential savings from improved efficiency across the public sector. The unit is now operating with interim staffing arrangements to deliver its objectives. However, recruitment of permanent staff is well under way, and it is hoped that the permanent positions will start to be filled in the coming weeks. The unit will function within the Strategic Investment Board and will regularly report progress to the Executive.

3.00 pm

Mr Elliott: Following discussions by the Budget review group and the Executive on the Presbyterian Mutual Society resolution, has any

of that money been paid to the savers yet? If not, why not? When do they expect it to be paid?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that everybody in this House will be satisfied that we have found a way forward and have reached agreement with the British Government to ensure that those people who have been hugely disadvantaged by not being able to access their savings can now do so. So, the process to make those payments is now under way, and we understand the urgency of that. The people who have been detrimentally affected have, as a result of a democratic vote, pronounced that they are satisfied that their moneys will be recovered. That is a source of great comfort to them. So, it is a work in progress, and I expect that, since the way forward has now been agreed, the matter of ensuring that people have access to their funds will happen very quickly.

Social Development

Mr Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Pensions Bill

2. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the implications for Northern Ireland of the Pensions Bill 2011. (AQO 194/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Pensions Bill 2011 was introduced at Westminster on 12 January 2011 and is being considered by the House of Commons. It makes changes to state and private pensions. For example, it accelerates the equalisation of the state pension age at 65 by November 2018 rather than by 2020. It increases state pension age to 66 for men and women by April 2020 and makes provision to support the introduction of automatic enrolment into workplace pension schemes, beginning in 2012. Subject to Executive agreement, I anticipate that we will introduce a corresponding Assembly Bill to maintain a single system of pensions across the United Kingdom, but I have grave concerns about the impact of the proposed changes to pension age, particularly on women.

Mrs Cochrane: Will the Minister confirm that he will work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure that changes brought about as a result of this Bill, or from

wider pension reform, are advertised as widely as possible so that there is no confusion and people can properly prepare for their financial future?

Mr McCausland: I can, indeed, assure the Member of that. It is important that we keep in close contact with DWP in London as the process moves forward and that all the information is disseminated as widely as possible locally in Northern Ireland so that people are not caught unawares and are fully aware of the implications of any changes.

Mr Campbell: The Minister, the House and, I am sure, the wider community will be aware of the concern, particularly among a small number of women who will be adversely affected by the change. Many of us are working to try to minimise that. However, given that it will come before the Assembly, can the Minister outline the period of time that the women will have to make belated preparation for a retirement that they did not expect but that now appears will happen?

Mr McCausland: The amount of notice that an individual woman will receive will depend on her date of birth but could range from four and a half years to nearly seven years. Women whose state pension age is due to increase the most have a longer period of notice than those affected earlier, for whom the increase is smaller.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister have any idea how many women could potentially be affected by the proposed Bill?

Mr McCausland: It is estimated that around 7,000 women will see a delay of between two months and 16 months in reaching their state pension age, depending on their date of birth. It affects women born between 6 April 1953 and 5 December 1953. The concern about the impact on women, therefore, has been raised in writing with Iain Duncan Smith, and I have urged him to consider measures to alleviate the impact of the proposals.

Town Centre Regeneration: Bangor

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Bangor town centre master plan. (AQO 195/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The consultation on the Bangor town centre master plan has been

successfully concluded and I plan to visit Bangor on 6 July to officially publish the completed document.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he see the Bangor town centre master plan as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the derelict Queen's Parade and the regeneration of Bangor town centre?

Mr McCausland: Following the consultation exercise in 2009, the Queen's Parade developers revised their proposals for the site in light of the comments received. The Department will assess those revised proposals against the town centre master plan, when published, to ensure that it will contribute to delivering the overall vision for the town. Assuming that the outcome of that assessment is positive, the next steps will be to move through the site assembly and planning processes, which may take two years to complete. However, I agree entirely with the Member that the master plan is essential and central to the regeneration of the seaside resort of Bangor.

Mr Cree: The town centre's redevelopment has dragged on for a long time. Will the Minister advise whether any funds will come from the Department to kick-start this thing into operation?

Mr McCausland: In relation to funding, government finances operate in a way that means it is not possible for my Department to ring-fence or allocate specific pots of money to individual towns. Therefore, the resources necessary to implement actions identified in the various master plans, of which there is quite a number, will be assessed and approved on a project-by-project basis.

The funding for individual projects identified in master plans will be provided from the Department's urban regeneration funding lines. I cannot provide guarantees that funding will be provided for any individual project until all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed. Although it would always be useful to have more money, my Department has a good record in securing funding for quality projects that have been worked up to a reasonable stage. Therefore, I am confident that the Department has adequate resources to deliver the master plans that are published.

Mr Agnew: Does the Minister agree that any master plan must provide space for young

people, given the period over which it is to serve the town? What consultations have taken place with young people, particularly teenagers, to ensure that Bangor has space for them?

Mr McCausland: As it is developed and taken forward, it is important that a master plan is responsive to the needs of all sections of the community, irrespective of their community background, age profile or whatever. If we are to have a vibrant Bangor town centre, we must accommodate the needs of younger people as well as middle-aged and older folk. I will write to the Member about the extent of consultation with younger people.

Mr Speaker: I take it that the Member wants to ask a supplementary question. I know that he has been up and down a number of times, but he should continue to rise in his place. I call Mr Fra McCann.

Mr F McCann: Five times; I was up that many times I was a bit dizzy the last time. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the sequencing of developments in Belfast city centre has been detrimental to the north and west sections of that city centre?

Mr Speaker: Order. I know and understand that supplementaries sometimes grow legs, but the question concerns Bangor town centre. I will ask the Minister whether he wishes to answer, but that supplementary has very little to do with the original question.

Mr McCausland: Far be it from me to criticise the geography of the Member opposite for his thinking that there is a connection between Bangor and Belfast town centre. However, there is certainly a point to be made that the sequencing of developments in Belfast city centre has an impact on the effectiveness of it. Also, developments outside Belfast have an impact on the sequencing, viability and sustainability of projects in the centre of Belfast.

Housing Associations

4. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline why seven housing associations have been suspended from building social housing. (AQO 196/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Seven registered housing associations have been suspended from the development programme because they failed

the Department's inspections on issues covering corporate governance, finance, property management and property development. Suspension action was taken to protect public funds and the rights of tenants.

The integrated inspection system, using suitably qualified accountants and technical experts in finance, property development and property management, was introduced in 2006 in response to Audit Office criticism on the scope of previous housing association inspections. Enhanced monitoring has been provided for reviewing housing associations' board minutes, management accounts and development progress. The Department has provided input to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations' training courses for new board members under all aspects of inspection.

Seven failed associations have already been suspended: Dungannon and District, Harmony Homes, Filor, SHAC, Helm, Rural and Habinteg. Successful associations include Clanmil, which received a substantial assurance, and Alpha, which received a satisfactory assurance when inspected recently.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is there the possibility that more associations will lose their development status? Does he agree that morale is pretty low in the associations and the Housing Executive? Connected to that is the time frame, which is why I asked my question: what is the time frame for bringing the matter to a conclusion?

Mr McCausland: There are 31 housing associations at present. Previously, there were 33, and we are now down to 31. When seven out of the 31 associations are removed from development status, that clearly indicates that there is a substantial element in the sector where there have been and still are difficulties. I appreciate the concern that that causes to people working in that sector, whether they are on the boards of housing associations or employed by housing associations. However, it is essential to ensure that the associations that are operating are fit for purpose and that they deliver a good service with the public money that passes to them and a good service to their tenants.

I had the opportunity recently to visit a number of housing initiatives carried out by a range of housing associations, and some are of exceptional quality in terms of both their organisation and delivery on the ground, and

that is indicated in the answer that I have already given. The process of monitoring and inspection will be ongoing. It is important that we do not simply get a snapshot of what it is today but what it will be over the next few years and thereafter. We must have a monitoring and inspection system in place that ensures good corporate governance and good delivery on an ongoing basis.

Lord Morrow: I listened intently to what the Minister said. With regard to the seven associations that have been suspended, is it right to say that the tenants received a good service? How long has the matter been under surveillance, and what sums of money have been involved to put right the wrongs that have gone on within the seven associations?

Mr McCausland: Each of the associations was assessed under four headings: corporate governance, finance, maintenance management and property development. Some associations that failed, failed in all categories, in that they were unacceptable right across the board. There were various degrees of shortcoming. It is possible to get the Member the information to identify those areas for each of relevant associations and to show their shortcomings. I do not have information regarding the amount of money that has been expended in trying to put those things right. In some ways, it would be difficult to do that, because you would be dealing with the amount of time that various inspections took and the number of people who were involved in them. I am sure that the Member would agree that it is essential that we have organisations that are fit for purpose. This will be an ongoing process. The resolution to the issue for the associations that are failed will vary from association to association, but, in some cases, the situation will be resolved through amalgamations with successful housing associations.

3.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I wish him well in his new portfolio. Will the Minister give us any insight into whether the suspensions will have any impact on the public social housing newbuild programme?

Mr McCausland: I assure the Member that everything possible is being done to ensure that it will not. I am aware of a number of projects in which associations were involved that have been removed from development status. In

some cases, projects already started may be allowed to come to completion or transferred to another association. Everything will be done to ensure that we carry on as far as possible with the social housing development programme. I have no indication at the moment that there will be any significant impact on the programme. In some cases, it seems that it may be possible to transfer from one association to another in a matter of months.

Ms Lo: Helm Housing built a block of apartments without planning permission in the Markets in south Belfast. Given that it is now suspended from building social housing, what will happen to that block of apartments?

Mr McCausland: I will have to come back to the Member on that very specific issue. The Member will be aware of the discussions that have been ongoing about Helm generally, but I will have to come back to her on that block of apartments.

Mr Speaker: Next on the list for questions is Adrian McQuillan. Before I call Mr McQuillan, I once again remind Members from all sides of the House that there is a trick to asking a supplementary question. Members must rise in their place as the Minister is sitting down. That is how the issue is dealt with. Members who wait and hesitate as the Minister is sitting down will very seldom get to ask a supplementary.

Mr Campbell: What is so hard about that?

Mr Speaker: There does seem to be some problem with it. I call Mr McQuillan.

Housing Executive: East Londonderry

5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many multi-element improvement schemes the Housing Executive has planned for the East Londonderry area in the current financial year. (AQO 197/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to funding pressures in the housing budget, there are no multi-element improvement schemes planned for anywhere in Northern Ireland in the current financial year. On my recent visit to Londonderry, I was interested to see the pilot scheme in the Creggan. Residents there voted overwhelmingly to transfer from the Housing Executive to a housing association. The housing association will spend approximately £2.5 million of its own money carrying out multi-element improvements

to the homes in question. That is a significant development, and I want to see what potential it may have for other areas.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I am disappointed. How many empty homes in East Londonderry could be used to help meet the housing need that exists?

Mr McCausland: The Member asked a very relevant and important question. Although we are going through a very challenging economic climate, it is imperative that we make the best use of the resources that we already have. I am determined to bring more empty homes back into use. For example, there are 41 Housing Executive voids in the Limavady and Coleraine district office areas at this time. Nineteen of those are undergoing major repairs and will be brought back into use once those are complete. In Limavady, another 13 properties, which were previously difficult to let, have been offered to and accepted by applicants on the waiting list. That leaves fewer than 10 properties in the area for which the Housing Executive has not yet been able to identify applicants.

I have been in the Department for only a number of weeks, but, during that period, I have emphasised to officials the priority that we need to give to tackling the issue of voids or empty homes. It seems pointless to be developing additional social housing, if, at the same time, you are ignoring the fact that there is stock that, in some cases, becomes void, derelict and a blight on neighbouring properties. In one of the areas that I visited in the constituency the other day, there were around 15 void properties. They had been lying empty for more than 10 years and were under the ownership of a housing association. What can we do to get those and other houses back into use as soon as possible?

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he tell us whether there is enough finance in the Housing Executive budget to provide a full maintenance programme in each of the next four years?

Mr McCausland: One of the things that I have done is to look carefully at the budget, because, effectively, I was handed the budget apportionment by my predecessor. I have taken that away, and we are looking at it. We will make an announcement in the very near future.

Mr Dallat: Does he agree that, in the past, significant improvements have been made to the housing stock through improvement schemes? Does he agree that it is a false economy to neglect that aspect of housing, given that tenants are deserving of the same rights as anyone else who lives in a house?

Mr McCausland: I agree with the Member entirely. It is too easy to say simply that we will put all our money into newbuild and ignore maintenance and other things. There has to be a balanced approach in every element of the market, whether that be people looking for a new house or people in an existing house, so that everybody gets a fair deal from the Housing Executive and the public sector. That is something that I will look at very carefully.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his response. I want to explore an answer that he gave earlier. How many vacant Housing Executive properties in the whole of Northern Ireland does he estimate are currently awaiting multi-element improvement work?

Mr McCausland: We are looking at the issue of multi-element improvement at the moment. Some research has been done on that, but, when the thing is discussed, there are conversations on what constitutes multi-element improvement. To some people, it is a very specific technical term. For others, it simply means a range of things to be done, whether that be installing new kitchens, doors, windows or whatever. We need to have a review. There is clearly a need for significant refurbishment work, and I think that that has perhaps been neglected in the past. A number of areas would certainly benefit from such work, but I do not have to hand exact figures on the number of properties involved. However, I am willing to look into that further and get back to the Member.

Welfare Reform

6. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how he intends to put forward the case to include regional differences in relation to welfare reform, while maintaining parity with Great Britain on social security matters. (AQO 198/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Welfare reform has been the subject of much debate since the coalition Government took up office last year and announced their proposals to restructure

radically our benefits and welfare system. Since taking up office, I have spoken with Lord Freud on the subject, and I intend to engage fully at ministerial and official level with colleagues across Whitehall as the proposals develop.

Northern Ireland receives more than £3 billion annually directly from the Treasury for social security benefits. That amount is based on need and the longstanding principle of parity, whereby someone in Northern Ireland receives the same rates of social security benefit and is subject to the same conditions as someone resident in Great Britain. The same standard should apply across all the United Kingdom. Social security is a devolved matter for Northern Ireland, which does set us apart from the other devolved Administrations, and consideration of regional differences in the current welfare reform proposals, in the context of parity, must be supported by clear evidence.

The Welfare Reform Bill going through Westminster contains a wide range of proposals aimed at ensuring that work always pays and at encouraging individuals to move from benefits into the labour market. Accepting that, we as an Assembly must recognise that this is not just about benefits. It is also about jobs, the economy, poverty, health and well-being, and it has implications across society. Therefore, it is essential that all Northern Ireland Departments be actively engaged in the process. It is expected that the Westminster Bill will gain Royal Assent by December 2011. Officials here are considering the implications of the proposals for Northern Ireland, on which there will be full consultation. I will bring my proposals for a Northern Ireland Welfare Reform Bill back to the Assembly in due course.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response. The dangers of breaking parity are enormous. Therefore, it is an issue that needs to be treated extremely carefully. I hope that the new Minister is a little more firm in favour of retaining parity than his predecessor. Will he detail whether his departmental officials have begun investigating what administrative structures will be required to manage the new universal credit in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: I understand that we have some new Members, but we need to get to the point at which Members do not read out supplementary questions. Therefore, I discourage them from doing so.

Mr McCausland: First, I agree with the Member that the principle of parity is essential. The implications of breaking parity would be considerable and detrimental, and a lot of work is going on to ensure that we are in a position to carry forward the implementation of any changes that come.

Mr Easton: What other Departments does the Minister envisage having a say in welfare reform?

Mr McCausland: As I already indicated, the proposals will impact right across society and, therefore, right across government. One of the main objectives of the proposals is to encourage individuals to move from benefits into work. That will have obvious implications for the Department for Employment and Learning, for example, and I have had some initial conversations with the relevant Minister and with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given their respective responsibilities in dealing with issues of training, the unemployed and the wider regional economy.

Mr McGlone: I wish the Minister well in his new appointment. In light of our unique position of having higher levels of disability living allowance (DLA) claimants in the North, partly due to the legacy of the Troubles, what case has been made to Westminster to take account of those exceptional and unfortunate circumstances?

Mr McCausland: I have already had a telephone conversation with Lord Freud about the differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and I intend to have a direct meeting with him as soon as possible. The Member highlights well the fact that there are differences, but we need to be conscious of their causes and nature. It is not simply that there is a higher level of DLA uptake here than in the rest of the United Kingdom; it is about the nature of that uptake and the factors that contribute to it. Northern Ireland has a much higher level of DLA uptake by those with, for example, mental illness. Therefore, we need to look carefully at the nature of the differences, the reasons for them and how we address the issue of ultimately getting people back into employment. One key factor must be that people's quality of life is much better when they are actively engaged. Therefore, we will work on that across all benefits as we examine the differences.

Community Groups: Audits

7. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what action his Department has taken or is planning to take to ensure that publicly funded audits commissioned by community organisations will not have to be duplicated for different funding bodies. (AQO 199/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I and my colleagues on the Northern Ireland Executive recognise the vital contribution that voluntary and community sector organisations make to society across Northern Ireland. We also understand that, in the current economic climate, the demand on their services is likely to increase. Therefore, it is important that we work harder to find ways to ensure that the Government maintain their support to the many voluntary and community sector organisations, which provide much-needed front line services to people experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. Only by eradicating unnecessary wastage and duplication of effort from our funding processes can we ensure that we achieve best value for money and the highest return from investment.

Duplication was one of a number of issues that the Comptroller and Auditor General identified in his report 'Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector', which was published in September 2010. Duplication is not just an issue for the Department for Social Development (DSD). It is incumbent on all Departments, their agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) to ensure that governance arrangements for funding relationships with the voluntary and community organisations are adequate but proportionate.

DSD is leading a pilot project with a regional voluntary organisation and its range of funders to determine the extent and degree of disproportion, auditing and bureaucracy. The project is the first stage in a programme of work that will address bureaucracy-related issues across the sector. Examples of the areas in which there could be improvement are the concordat, audit compliance and community audits.

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease before we move back to the Final Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Final Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] do now pass. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the Budget (No. 2) Bill requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 65; Noes 15.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

UNIONIST:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

OTHER:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr F McCann and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt,

Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt,
Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Agnew and Mr Allister.

Total votes	80	Total Ayes	65	[81.3%]
Nationalist Votes	37	Nationalist Ayes	24	[64.9%]
Unionist Votes	35	Unionist Ayes	34	[97.1%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	7	[87.5%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies
and are therefore not counted in the result:
Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson,
Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan,
Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt,
Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

*That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] do now
pass.*

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

**Finance (No. 3) Bill: Legislative
Consent Motion**

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

*That this Assembly agrees that the UK Parliament
should consider amendments to the Finance (No.
3) Bill to extend to Northern Ireland the provisions
dealing with mutual assistance for the recovery of
taxes etc.*

The motion, though technical in nature, seeks
the agreement of the Assembly to extend to
Northern Ireland the provisions in the Westminster
Finance (No. 3) Bill that deal with the mutual
assistance recovery directive (MARD). The
directive was agreed by EU Finance Ministers
last year. Under it, EU member states can provide
each other with assistance in the recovery of tax
debts and duties, which includes the service of
documents and the exchange of information in
connection with the recovery of claims.
[Interruption.] I think that there is a separate
Assembly meeting going on in the corner.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I assure you, Minister,
those Members will be quiet after this. Continue.

Mr Wilson: Thank you. The new directive
fundamentally modernises and expands the
scope of the existing directive. It affects
individuals and businesses owing taxes and
duties within the EU. The provisions to be taken
forward in the Finance (No. 3) Bill would fulfil the
UK's obligations in implementing the directive. It
provides reciprocal arrangements for recovering
and enforcing tax debts and for the exchange of
information across the EU.

Mr Allister: I listened to the Minister's
explanation. Will he confirm that this measure
could assist in bringing to financial justice criminal
empires such as that of Mr Slab Murphy?

Mr Wilson: I hope that it will be used for exactly
that purpose and others. Where people are
operating along the border between Northern
Ireland and the Irish Republic, the provisions
of this directive should enable Her Majesty's
Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to seek
information about activities, tax liabilities,
earnings etc on one side of the border for
someone living on this side of the border.
Therefore, although the Member may agree with
me on some issues around interference from

Europe, this is probably one example where we would agree that European directives could actually help in the pursuit of those participating in criminal activities. Hopefully, under this Bill, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will vigorously pursue such people to ensure that the finances that they seek to hide on one side of the border are brought to light and tax liabilities are met. It will improve tax compliance and make the tax system fairer to those who already pay their taxes and charges, as opposed to those who seek to avoid them, as the Member pointed out.

Under EU law, the directive must be implemented by 31 December 2011. However, the current legislation does not provide for the introduction of a new directive. The Westminster Bill would permit the UK, as a member state, to assist other member states in ensuring that all taxes due are properly collected and relevant information is exchanged.

Among other things, the directive extends the scope of the existing directive to include all national taxes and duties, local taxes, motor taxes and agricultural levies. It permits member states to provide for the exchange of information without request on refunds, except for VAT; it provides for tax officials from one member state to attend or participate in administrative inquiries in another member state; and it permits a range of national bodies to engage in the mutual assistance process under the general oversight of a central liaison office.

The inclusion of Northern Ireland in the scope of the legislation is routine. The changes are considered to be necessary — indeed, unavoidable — and non-controversial. Although the Assembly could legislate in its own right, such legislation would not be as comprehensive in respect of future changes to the directive and could give rise to difficulties, given that the central liaison office for the UK as a member state has to be Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. It would remain the case that the directive would have to be implemented by 31 December 2011.

As you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Westminster will not normally legislate on devolved matters except with the agreement of the devolved legislature in the form of a legislative consent motion. The UK Government tabled amendments to the Finance (No. 3) Bill earlier this month. Those will be considered by

Westminster at Report Stage, which is scheduled to take place in early July, following this debate. If the legislative consent motion is not agreed by this Assembly, those amendments would be withdrawn. The amendments in question remove provisions that exclude Northern Ireland transferred matters from the remit of the Bill, making changes to the relevant provisions within the Finance (No. 3) Bill. The provisions also implement similar changes for Scotland.

The view of other Departments has been sought on the legislative consent motion, and there has been liaison with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of the Environment, the two other Departments most likely to be interested in the issue. I understand that both Departments support the legislative consent motion, as do the relevant Committees. All other Departments were content or had no comment.

The changes introduced as a result of this legislative consent motion will provide a means for legislating for implementation of the mutual assistance recovery directive in Northern Ireland. The legislative consent motion has been reported on by the Finance and Personnel Committee, which indicated that it was content to support the motion. However, I would like to touch on two issues raised by the Finance Committee: the timeliness of the motion and the question of whether tax-varying powers that may be devolved to the Assembly in future, such as corporation tax, would be covered by the Westminster amendments. Committee members expressed concern about the very short notice given on the legislative consent motion. Its necessity was not brought to the attention of my Department until just before the dissolution of the Assembly in March 2011. At that point, the issue had to wait for the start of the new Assembly term. I share the concerns of the Committee in that respect and have written to the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury to register those concerns.

On general rating matters, I reassure the House that there is regular liaison between my Department and GB counterparts. The matter is much broader and outside the normal rating system. Nevertheless, I am seeking views on what steps could be taken to ensure that devolved bodies are advised by the coalition Government of the need for legislative consent motions as soon as possible. Account will

necessarily have to be taken of the steps that can be taken by both Administrations.

On the issue of future tax-varying powers, I have been advised that there will be no conflict between the implementation of MARD and any change in corporation tax levels. The MARD arrangements apply to all taxes and duties, including corporation tax. As a matter of European law, these arrangements would continue to operate in relation to corporation tax whatever any new arrangements may be. Indeed, MARD provisions could assist with collection. There may, however, need to be changes in the GB implementing legislation to reflect any future corporation tax arrangements for Northern Ireland. At this stage, the extent is unknown but can be kept under review.

Having received the support of the Executive Committee, I would welcome the support of Members of the Assembly.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister of Finance and Personnel wrote on 20 May this year to seek the views of the Finance and Personnel Committee on a proposed amendment to the Finance (No. 3) Bill, which would extend to here provisions in respect of the implementation of the mutual assistance recovery directive. Given that this covers devolved matters, this Assembly's consent is required in the form of the legislative consent motion before us.

In his correspondence, the Minister advised that this matter may also be of interest to the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. To help to inform its deliberations, my Committee therefore sought the views of the relevant Assembly Statutory Committees on the proposed legislative consent motion and the implications for those Departments. The Agriculture Committee confirmed that it was content with the proposed legislative consent motion, and the Environment Committee advised that its Department did not envisage any difficulties in respect of the provisions of the directive.

The Finance and Personnel Committee took evidence from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on the proposed legislative consent motion on 8 June 2011, and details of the Committee's deliberations were set out in a short, informal report issued to all

MLAs last week. I shall, however, summarise the key points for Members' convenience and for the record.

In their evidence, DFP officials advised that the Department believed the inclusion of the provisions in the legislation to be, in this instance, routine and the changes to be unavoidable and non-controversial. Although it is possible for the Assembly to pass legislative provisions to implement the MARD, it was thought that those would be less comprehensive than if they were to be included in the Westminster legislation and would be limited in scope should any further amendments, additions or extensions be made to the directive. Additionally, local regulations would need to ensure that the directive is implemented by 31 December this year otherwise we could face infraction proceedings. Members were also advised that the Scottish Government were content for Scotland to be included in the amendment to the Westminster legislation.

During the evidence session, members sought clarification that any tax-varying powers that may be devolved to the Assembly in future, such as corporation tax, would be covered by the amendment to the Finance (No. 3) Bill. The Department, as the Minister mentioned, has since confirmed that some technical changes to the implementing legislation may be necessary in the event of the devolution of corporation tax. The central principles of the MARD will, however, continue to be applicable.

Although accepting the rationale for our inclusion in this amendment in this instance, members were concerned at the delays in bringing the matter before the Assembly. It must be stated, as the Finance Minister has just done, that that was not the fault of the Department of Finance and Personnel. The EU directive was agreed in March 2010. However, in correspondence with the Committee, DFP advised that there appears to have been a subsequent lapse in communication with the devolved Administrations, with the need for formal consent from Scotland and ourselves not being recognised by HMRC until March 2011.

Moving forward, it is clear to the Committee that the process relating to legislative consent motions needs to be further developed and refined. The Assembly must be given sufficient time to examine proposed Westminster legislation that relates to transferred matters and to determine

whether that is indeed the best way forward or whether it is more appropriate to pass our own legislation. In this respect, the Committee has asked the Department for clarification of the lines of responsibility for notifying the devolved Administrations of legislative or policy changes at Westminster or European level that will impact on transferred matters and of whether proactive measures are required locally in that regard.

4.00 pm

In respect of the motion, having considered the evidence, the Committee agreed to support the Department in seeking the Assembly's agreement that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Finance (No. 3) Bill to extend to here the provisions dealing with mutual assistance for the recovery of taxes etc. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I commend the motion to the House.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion as Chair of the Environment Committee. I thank the Minister of Finance and Personnel for introducing the legislative consent motion to the House. The issue was brought to the Environment Committee's attention by the Committee for Finance and Personnel on 2 June 2011. The Bill will allow the UK Government to implement the mutual assistance recovery directive, which permits member states to recover and enforce tax debts, to serve documents and to exchange information about debts across the EU.

The Environment Committee was advised that, although the Department of Finance and Personnel is taking the lead on the issue, it may be of relevance to the Department of the Environment in relation to the plastic bag levy. The Committee asked the Department for its position on the consent motion and was advised that the directive may be of some assistance in relation to the recovery of non-payment of the carrier bags levy by organisations moving to other member states. However, it did not envisage any difficulty with it. The Committee was content with that response and advised the Committee for Finance and Personnel accordingly.

I would also like to draw the House's attention to an additional comment from the Department of the Environment, just to ensure that there is no confusion. While first considering the impact of the directive in Northern Ireland, DFP considered that there might also be a link to the

Driver and Vehicle Agency, which is responsible for collecting vehicle licences. However, the vehicle licensing function is an excepted matter and is, therefore, the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency under an agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport and, therefore, is not relevant to the motion.

On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim tacaíocht don mholadh seo. We support the motion. As we know, Westminster is passing this part of what is a wider EU framework that applies to the island of Ireland. Obviously, harmonisation of fiscal powers right across this island is what Sinn Féin would like to see. We believe that it is common sense; it is good for the economy; it is good for business; and it is good for communities.

We currently have two competing economies on the island of Ireland, and it is in all our interests that the economies work together rather than compete against each other. It does not make sense that we have qualifications that do not match, mobile phone systems that do not match, and two health and education systems. It is stating the obvious, so we support the motion.

Mr Wilson: I am pleased that we have had a short debate on this issue. I welcome the support from the Chairman of the Finance Committee and the Chairperson of the Environment Committee. As I said in my opening speech, I would have preferred us to have a different approach to this, and I have written to the Treasury Secretary. This has been known about for some time — since, I think, about 2009. But it is only recently — just before the Assembly elections — that we were notified. I suppose, had the Assembly elections not intervened, we may have had more time in the House, but we were only notified in March that this was going to be included as an amendment to the Finance (No. 3) Bill, and that did not give the House much time.

Hopefully, through the contact that my officials have and that which I will have with the Treasury Secretary, that will not happen in future.

I will take up one point in particular, because I think that there was a bit of a misunderstanding

in one of Caitríona Ruane's comments. This is not about the harmonisation of taxes. Sometimes, in fact, the debts that arise may do so because there are different rates of taxes. However, this is all about situations where persons have a debt that is owed to the authorities in Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom but they have not paid that debt. In cases where such debts arise as a result of a tax liability, the proposed measure allows for information to be exchanged and for officials from the United Kingdom to seek information on that liability, and vice versa. In case there is a misconception, this is about pursuing debt and the information that is required to recover debt. It is not about the harmonisation of tax rates.

In conclusion, I believe that this measure will ensure that Northern Ireland does not lose out on any benefits brought about by the directive by having to self-legislate. It will enable us to pursue tax liabilities, which, of course, means more money for the public purse here in Northern Ireland. It will prevent people from avoiding their liabilities, and, therefore, I commend it to the House and look forward to support for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that the UK Parliament should consider amendments to the Finance (No. 3) Bill to extend to Northern Ireland the provisions dealing with mutual assistance for the recovery of taxes etc.

Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 is an annual Order that sets out the rates of contributory and non-contributory benefits, together with the various premiums that form part of the income-related benefits. In general, the new amounts are based on the increase in the consumer prices index (CPI) over the 12 months ending in September 2010, which showed an increase of 3.1%.

Members will be aware that, in past years, the retail prices index (RPI) was used as the basis for increasing most benefits. The Westminster Government decided that, from April this year, the uprating of benefits will be based on the increase in the consumer prices index. Although they acknowledge that no single index is perfect, the coalition Government view the consumer prices index as the most appropriate measure of price inflation for this purpose.

Whenever the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions makes an uprating Order under the Social Security Administration Act 1992, my Department is empowered to make a corresponding Order. There is no power to set different rates of benefits for Northern Ireland. The basic state pension, which, for many, is the foundation of income in retirement, is increased by 4.6%, in line with the commitment given by the coalition Government at Westminster. The new rate for the basic state pension is £102.15 a week for a single person, which is an increase of £4.50 a week. From April, increases in state pension credit mean that no single pensioner will have to live on less than £137.35 a week and no couple on less than £209.70 a week. The above-earnings increase in the pension credit guarantee underlines the continuing commitment to tackling pensioner poverty.

I am sure that Members across the House will welcome those increases to state pension and pension credit. I fully appreciate that many of us wish that we could do even more, but, as I mentioned, my Department has no power to set different benefit rates for Northern Ireland. It is empowered only to set the same rates as apply in Great Britain.

The total cost of the new benefit rates for this year is approximately £183 million.

I am sure that all Members will wish to ensure that people in Northern Ireland, including some of the most vulnerable in our society, continue to receive the new benefit rates and will, therefore, join me in supporting the Order.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, I support the motion. As we have just heard from the Minister, the Order is one of a series of statutory rules relating to the annual uprating for rates of social security benefit, pensions and allowances from April 2011.

At its meeting of 23 June, the Committee noted that the previous Committee was content with the proposed statutory rule on 10 February 2011, and, on 21 March 2011, it agreed a motion that it had no objections to the statutory rule laid in the Assembly on 18 March 2011.

I note that the Department for Social Development conducted an equality screening exercise on the proposals. It concluded that the proposals do not have any significant implications for equality of opportunity, as they merely discharge the Department's statutory duty and alter rates. I also understand that the Department has not specific authority to deviate from the rates and amounts specified in the GB Order and that that, therefore, maintains the parity principle in social security and pension matters. The maintenance of the parity principle is, of course, something that the House has discussed before and will, no doubt, have an opportunity to debate again in the near future, when welfare and pension reform proposals and legislation come before the Assembly.

I understand that the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2011 includes provision for weekly rates of statutory paternity pay and adoption pay, which falls to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and I am informed that DEL and the previous Committee for Employment and Learning were content with the proposals in the Order.

As I said, the Committee for Social Development noted the Order at its meeting of 23 June and, notwithstanding reservations over the parity principle that some Committee members have, agreed to support the motion.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased to note the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development's comments and his reference to its meeting on 23 June. I am pleased that there is a consensus of support across the Committee and the Assembly for the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011, and I thank the Committee for the positive way in which it dealt with it. I am certain that we all welcome the increase to benefits made by the Order, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Protection of Freedoms Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Protection of Freedoms Bill dealing with the Disclosure and Barring Service contained in chapter 3 of Part 5 of, and schedule 8 to, the Bill as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons.

I seek the House's approval of a legislative consent motion that relates to the extension to Northern Ireland of further safeguarding of vulnerable groups provisions of the Protection of Freedoms Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 11 February 2011 and completed its Committee Stage on 17 May.

This is the second legislative consent motion in connection with safeguarding of vulnerable groups provisions in the Bill. Combined, the provisions are required to give effect to the recommendations of the review of the vetting and barring scheme (VBS), which started on October 2010. The review report was published on 11 February 2011. Changes are being made to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 to give effect to review recommendations, which require legislative change.

The first legislative consent motion related specifically to the safeguarding of vulnerable groups provisions contained in chapter 1 of Part 5 of, and schedule 7 to, the Bill as introduced. It was successfully debated in the Assembly on 21 March 2011. This second legislative consent motion relates to additional safeguarding of vulnerable groups provisions that were tabled as Government amendments at Committee Stage.

4.15 pm

The Protection of Freedoms Bill contains seven Parts. This legislative consent motion and the one that was approved under the previous mandate relate to clauses in Part 5 and its associated schedules only. The additional safeguarding vulnerable groups provisions are contained in chapter 3 of Part 5 of and schedule 8 to the Bill as amended. All were tabled as Government amendments. They provide for the establishment of a new body corporate called the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and for the transfer of functions to the new body

from the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) and the Secretary of State. The new schedule makes detailed provision in respect of the constitution and governance of the DBS.

Additional statutory provision is required to give effect to one of the vetting and barring scheme review report's recommendations, which is to merge the ISA and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The ISA currently provides a barring function in Northern Ireland under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. The barring function relates to decision-making by the ISA about which individuals should be included on the barred list on the basis that they have harmed a child or a vulnerable adult or have placed a child or a vulnerable adult at risk of harm. The ISA assumed responsibility for barring decision-making from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Education in March 2009. The ISA also makes barring decisions in England and Wales.

Statutory provision is required to dissolve the ISA; to establish the replacement body, the DBS, and to make detailed provision in respect of the constitution and governance of the DBS; to transfer the barring function of the ISA to the new DBS; to transfer to the DBS certain functions of the Secretary of State under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 and functions of the Secretary of State under Part V of the Police Act 1997. The Secretary of State's functions under that Act relate to disclosure functions that are currently undertaken on behalf of the Secretary of State in England and Wales by the CRB. In Northern Ireland, the disclosure functions of the Department of Justice under Part V of the Police Act 1997 are undertaken by AccessNI. That arrangement is not impacted by any provision in the Protection of Freedoms Bill, and AccessNI will continue to issue disclosure certificates in Northern Ireland under Part V of the 1997 Act.

If the provisions to which the legislative consent memorandum relate are not extended, we are in danger of creating a period during which we have no body making barring decisions about individuals who are found to be engaging in behaviours that harm or place at risk of harm children and vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland. The ISA has been making barring decisions in Northern Ireland since March 2009. The

Department remains committed to the concept of barring decision-making by an independent body. It provides for a consistency in barring decision-making and also simplifies the processes of recognising barring decisions that are made in other parts of the UK and sharing barred list information across the UK. We have had the benefit of Northern Ireland representation on the board. Under the changes to legislation that are being made under the Protection of Freedoms Bill, Whitehall Ministers will be required to consult Northern Ireland Ministers when making future appointments to the board of the new Disclosure and Barring Service.

It is essential to place the vetting and barring scheme in context. It is only one of a range of mechanisms that are needed to safeguard children and vulnerable adults. Its specific aim is to prevent unsuitable individuals from gaining employment or volunteering opportunities with children and vulnerable adults. The legislation that establishes the scheme provides the definition of work with children and vulnerable adults, which is the range of positions from which barred people will be prevented from working. It creates requirements to check individuals seeking work in those positions against the barred list and creates offences for seeking work with children or vulnerable adults if barred or offering work to a barred individual.

The vetting and barring scheme effectively controls those who get across the door, or not, as the case may be. Given that nothing is known about 95% of people who apply to work with children and vulnerable adults, it is what happens after employees and volunteers cross the door that really matters. Good staff training, supervision and management are crucial, and my Department has provided guidance on what constitutes good safeguarding practice in organisations. Checking individuals prior to being offered work is only one measure of good practice.

The vetting and barring scheme and the legislation that establishes it is supported by Part V of the Police Act 1997. That legislation provides for the disclosure of information, including criminal conviction and caution information, barred list information and relevant non-conviction information that is known to the police. AccessNI, which is the responsibility of the Department of Justice, operates under Part V of the Police Act 1997.

AccessNI works closely with the PSNI, which, in turn, has in place well-established arrangements with the gardaí central vetting unit in the Republic of Ireland. I know that members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety had some concerns about the sharing of information across the border for child and adult protection purposes. I hope that my officials provided some assurances on the extent to which information is shared already.

I offer similar assurances to the House. I accept fully that our land border creates a number of safeguarding challenges. However, under operational policing arrangements, the PSNI and the gardaí routinely share information for employment vetting purposes. Those arrangements have been in place for a considerable time and apply to individuals who have a current or previous Republic of Ireland address and who are seeking work with children or vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland. I accept that the arrangement does not currently extend to the exchange of "soft information", as non-conviction information is often referred to.

It is my understanding that, in the Republic of Ireland, legislation will be introduced that, if necessary, will make provision for agreements with other jurisdictions around the sharing of information for vetting purposes, including soft information. The latest position that has been provided by officials in the South is that draft heads of a Bill have now been completed and are currently being discussed with the Office of the Attorney General.

If I may, I will stray into an area that is the responsibility of the Minister of Justice. It is important to go there to place the vetting and barring scheme in the context of a wider public protection agenda and to illustrate the extent to which the agencies on both sides of the border co-operate for public protection purposes. I understand that here is a high level of operational co-operation and information sharing between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána on sex offenders who travel between jurisdictions. That is governed by an overarching agreement between the British and Irish Governments and an operational memorandum between the PSNI and the gardaí. In effect, that means that there are single points of contact in each service to deal with the issues, and that has resulted in swift action when necessary.

Members of An Garda Síochána also attend local area public protection meetings in border areas and exchange relevant information under current public protection arrangements in Northern Ireland. Both jurisdictions have legislation in place that requires sex offenders to notify their details to the police, and both are looking at ways to strengthen the requirements and increase public protection.

I am also advised that much work has been done to ensure that the border is not used to escape justice by offenders who are subject to conditions on release from serving custodial sentences. There are also aspects of shared research and training in risk assessment, and the Irish Probation Service is working with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland on developing practice guidelines to ensure that cross-border practices are similar.

Members will also be aware that, under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council, arrangements have been put in place to enable officials on both sides of the border to co-operate on child protection matters. As a result of that co-operation, a number of initiatives have been taken forward. They include the development of a joint protocol dealing with children and families about whom professionals have concerns and who move between both jurisdictions; work to jointly develop child protection advice and guidance material for anyone who has concerns about a child; and the development and roll-out of North/South child protection online information to inform safeguarding and child protection practice on both sides of the border.

Much progress has been made on child and adult protection, and I accept that much more remains to be made. An effective vetting and barring scheme that prevents unsuitable people from obtaining work with children and vulnerable adults is an essential part of our safeguarding portfolio. On that basis, I ask the House to support the motion.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety took evidence on the Bill at its meetings on 8 June and 15 June, and we signed off a report on our findings at the meeting on 22 June. The Committee supports the legislative consent

motion, and we believe that the Protection of Freedoms Bill is an important tool in our ongoing campaign for improved safeguarding arrangements for children and vulnerable adults.

As the Minister said, the legislative consent motion is required as a result of amendments made to the Bill at Committee Stage in the House of Commons. The amendments provide for the establishment of a new body named the Disclosure and Barring Service, which will merge the functions of the Independent Safeguarding Authority and the Criminal Records Bureau. In effect, the passing of the motion will allow the Disclosure and Barring Service to undertake barring functions in this region and decide which individuals should be included on barred lists on the basis that they have harmed or are a danger to a child or vulnerable adult.

The Committee took evidence on the legislative consent motion from the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner. Both organisations endorsed the motion, and the Committee shared their view that the new vetting and barring scheme that will be implemented under the Protection of Freedoms Bill will enable vital information to be effectively shared on an east-west basis. That will have a considerable impact in making sure that people who are a threat to children or vulnerable adults do not obtain either paid work or volunteering opportunities with them.

However, the Committee was strongly of the view that the motion is only one element of safeguarding children and vulnerable people. We are concerned about the arrangements both between the North and the South, and with European jurisdictions outside these islands. During our evidence taking, we were alerted to gaps in the information that is shared between the PSNI and the gardaí. We understand that conviction data is shared but that soft information is not. Therefore, when someone applies for a job here and a check is carried out, only any convictions that that person has in the South will show up. However, if the guards have suspicions about that person or cautions have been issued, that will not show up. I think that we can all agree that that is very worrying.

Members have heard what the Minister said about this issue, and that he supports further legislation. The Committee urges the Minister to continue the good work that has been started by the North/South Ministerial Council on

this matter. We have heard that the South is drafting legislation that will make provision for arrangements with other jurisdictions on the sharing of information for vetting purposes. That will include soft information. The Committee welcomed that news and encourages the Department to offer what support it can to their counterpart officials in that process.

I think that we would all agree that, given the relationship that we have with the South, that information needs to be shared and we need to do much more to protect children and vulnerable adults. That is particularly the case, given how easy it is for people to move between Monaghan and Tyrone or between Fermanagh and Cavan.

A lot more work needs to be done through a European-wide approach. Conviction information is not currently shared between European member states, with the exception of the arrangements on these islands. That will require further investigation by the Assembly.

The Committee welcomes the legislative consent motion. The Protection of Freedoms Bill will mean that we will have a strong vetting and barring scheme that will help to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Wells: I also support the motion. Legislative consent motions present slightly difficult issues for Committees because, to some extent, we are handed a done deal — a fait accompli. Not to support a legislative consent motion would put us completely out of line with the rest of the United Kingdom and force us to devise our own legislation. However, it also means that we have to slavishly follow whatever is put on the table in front of us. That can be difficult because, sometimes, there are particular problems that arise in Northern Ireland that are different to other parts of the United Kingdom. However, obviously we do not want to do anything that would impede the protection of our children, so we are more than happy to support the motion.

As the Chairperson and the Minister mentioned, during discussions on the motion, an issue arose that alarmed us greatly. If you are a person with a predisposition to molest children and are convicted in Strabane, and then move to Lifford or vice versa, that information moves with you. However, if you have been removed from a position as a teacher in Lifford because of indulging in activity that is clearly beyond the pale, but which does not lead to conviction,

and you move to Strabane, you can continue as a teacher, and that soft intelligence does not move with you.

The Minister has reassured us by saying that legislation is going before the Dáil in the Irish Republic to address that situation.

That is very welcome, and the sooner it occurs, the better. I urge the Minister, under the auspices of his colleague in the Republic, to urge the Department in the Republic to move as fast as it can on that issue, because not doing so will leave a loophole that could be exploited by the more sinister elements of society.

4.30 pm

Another issue that arose during discussions on the motion was that soft intelligence in the European Community does not follow people who come to live or work in Northern Ireland. Indeed, in some instances, no intelligence at all follows them. With Northern Ireland becoming a more diverse society and more people coming in from eastern Europe and other EEC states, there is a danger that our children could be exposed to those who have a conviction or have at least been charged with a serious offence that is not known when they apply for a job looking after children in Northern Ireland. Therefore, anything that can be done to plug those loopholes and address that issue will be very much welcomed. I hope that the Committee, the Minister — I accept that we are straying slightly into issues that are under the control of the Department of Justice, but the two are linked — and his counterpart will keep a close eye on the situation to ensure that the flaws in the present arrangements are plugged as soon as possible. We must do everything that we can to ensure that our children are protected.

In the field of clerical sex abuse on the island of Ireland, there has, unfortunately, been a tendency to move perpetrators on to the next parish or diocese rather than seek a prosecution. The difficulty is that such moves often cross borders, and we have seen practical examples of how that can lead to problems and, unfortunately, to the ruination of children's lives by those who should never have been in control or charge of them. Notwithstanding those concerns, I am more than happy to support the Minister's proposal.

I apologise that I have to dash away to an important meeting so, unfortunately, I may not

be here to listen to the Minister's response. I am sure that it will be full of wisdom and useful information. My departure is no reflection whatever on the work that he is doing. Things have just come together to create an unfortunate set of circumstances this evening.

Mr McCarthy: I will be brief, as everything has been covered by the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson. My party and I fully support the legislative consent motion. There can be no greater issue than the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children and young people, from devious, sinister and vile individuals.

To reduce the need for multiple checks on the same person, the Protection of Freedoms Bill will ensure that criminal record checks are constantly updated and will transfer when a person changes job. That should reduce the number of background checks and will, I hope, mean that there is no backlog and no case can slip through the system. However, one or two issues remain, such as the potential gap that Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) highlighted. It believes that the definition of regulated activities is too restrictive. I understand that NICCY is concerned that those who are not involved in regulated activities but have contact with youngsters will not be covered by the motion. Perhaps the Minister could clarify the matter for that body and for those of us in the Chamber this afternoon. It is vital for the safety of our youngsters that vetting and barring arrangements are carried out in the most thorough and efficient manner to ensure that they receive the highest possible level of protection at all times. Like Mr Wells, I have to vacate the Chamber for a short time, but, undoubtedly, I want to hear the Minister's response.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, support the legislative consent motion. The Minister, the Deputy Chair and the Chair adequately covered the issues involved. However, as someone who represents a border constituency, I know that the exchange of what is termed "soft information" is essential. The lack of such an exchange creates a real worry because, as has been stated, people can cross the border at will. Some in my constituency live within a stone's throw of the Twenty-six Counties, so it is an ongoing worry. Therefore, I certainly support the legislative consent motion.

Mr Poots: The success of child and adult protection often stands or falls on the presence of good communication, co-ordination and collaboration. Under the VBS, for the first time we will have vetting and barring arrangements that operate broadly consistently across the UK. Each jurisdiction of the UK will have in place arrangements that facilitate the sharing of information on individuals who potentially present a serious risk to children and vulnerable adults. Also, barring decisions will be made consistently, making it possible to recognise barring decisions made in other parts of the UK. That will mean that a person barred from working with vulnerable groups in England, Wales and Scotland can and will be barred from similar work in Northern Ireland.

My officials will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. It is imperative for the Republic to get the legislation that is being drawn up right. It is a country that has had very difficult situations to deal with and has not handled them well, to the extent that it brought down a Government. It is absolutely incumbent on the current Government to get the strongest possible legislation to ensure that paedophiles and others who want to prey on innocent children and vulnerable adults do not have the opportunity to do so. The Government in the Republic must take every step they can to assist us in ensuring that those activities do not happen. Reciprocal arrangements need to be put in place so that neither jurisdiction holds back any information on individuals who wish to behave in a manner that could harm children or vulnerable adults.

Mr McCarthy raised an issue that NICCY brought to his attention, and the definition of "regulated activity" has been reduced in scope, with the intention of covering posts that have the most intensive control of children and vulnerable adults. The DBS needs to be supplemented with other arrangements, such as supervision, training and management, which are issues that I have already commented on.

With all of that in mind, I commend the motion to the House. It is a move forward and a step in the right direction. I trust that the legislation that will emanate from my counterpart in the Irish Republic will sufficiently strengthen how we handle all of this and that the record that Northern Ireland and, to a greater extent, the Republic of Ireland have of past child abuse will be looked back on as something that we

ensured did not continue. I further trust that we will ensure that children and vulnerable adults receive adequate protection and are not left in a situation where they can be preyed on by the most evil, pernicious and vile people who would abuse them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Protection of Freedoms Bill dealing with the Disclosure and Barring Service contained in chapter 3 of Part 5 of, and schedule 8 to, the Bill as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons.

Committee Business

Higher Education: Tuition Fees

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that funding is available to maintain the excellence of Northern Ireland's higher education system and is consistent with our aim of maximising educational opportunities for all.

I am pleased to move the motion to debate the important issue of how higher education is to be funded in Northern Ireland. The issue is also being addressed in other parts of the United Kingdom, and I am sure that many colleagues here have had the opportunity to discuss it with the electorate.

It is vital that the House gives time and space to debate the wider arguments for and against the implications of increasing student fees in Northern Ireland. The level of tuition fees, even if they are not paid up front, has significant implications for affordability and access to higher education. That is not just a matter of concern for students and universities; it has far greater ramifications for the economy and society at large.

The Committee for Employment and Learning has been working closely with the main stakeholders. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has just closed its public consultation on higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements, and it will brief the Committee this Wednesday on the 40 responses that have been received. However, time is running out. Prospective students urgently need a clearer indication of the Minister's plans, so that they can make university applications for the 2012 academic year.

As the House will be aware from its scrutiny of the Budget for 2011-15, the Department for Employment and Learning has focused the bulk of its cuts on the higher education sector.

Those cuts are expected to be met in two ways: through the universities making £28 million of annual efficiency savings and through the replacement of a further £40 million per annum core funding to the universities with higher tuition fees for students.

Towards the end of March 2011, the Department for Employment and Learning received additional funding amounting to £51 million. That was widely reported by the media as plugging the gap in the Department's budget. However, that was not the case, and it is important to stress that that was not the case. I particularly want Mr Wilson, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to take note of that. The additional funding was earmarked for committed capital expenditure transferred from his Department for inescapable pressures on the employment service and for innovation funding discontinued by the Executive's innovation fund. There was no further money for higher education, a fact that the Minister of Finance and Personnel must take on board.

Last week, the Committee heard evidence from Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster, both of which are urgently looking for solutions to meet the £40 million shortfall. We have made it clear that the higher education system must convince the wider community that it is not an ivory tower devolved from the lives of ordinary people but a force for economic development, opportunity and wealth creation. In that regard, I was pleased to see representatives from Queen's University and Members of the Assembly in the Long Gallery today, where they were attempting to engage and explain. We should do more of that. However, they are to be commended.

The University of Ulster's Professor Barnett has stated that the university will need to shed up to 200 jobs to effect the required £28 million in efficiency savings. Queen's University has also indicated that the jobs of some 200 of its employees are under threat and that some planned programmes will not go ahead. Both universities have described the devastating impact of trying to cope with the funding being reduced by £40 million, with the vice chancellor of Queen's University referring to it as a doomsday scenario in which student numbers would be drastically reduced or two faculties — for example, the faculty of arts and humanities and the faculty of social sciences — would have to close. Two faculties in Queen's University would

have to close if the funding gap is not met. Similarly, the vice chancellor of the University of Ulster, Professor Richard Barnett, stated that he would be forced to close one of his campuses should such funding pressures be enforced.

The Committee is also aware of the knock-on effect on the Northern Ireland economy of any reduction in the capacity of universities. Higher education plays a significant role in a nation's economic development, acting as a driving force behind technological change, expansion of industries and skill building in the workforce. The universities here attract just under £100 million of research income per annum, and Queen's alone makes a further contribution of around £700 million to the economy.

The Committee also consulted the CBI, which suggested that there should be a modest increase in tuition fees and a reallocation of money from other Departments. In addition, the CBI addressed the benefits derived by graduates. The latest Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) labour force survey shows that the employment rate for graduates in Northern Ireland is 85.7%, compared with 60.9% for non-graduates. It is argued that those graduates could well afford to pay fees later in their working life, shifting the burden of payment from the taxpayer to the recipient of the benefit. The CBI went on to say that, since the original introduction of variable rate tuition fees, there has been no reduction in student uptake from lower income groups.

4.45 pm

Other stakeholders have raised concern over the time it is taking to come to a definitive decision on tuition fees. In her letter, the chief executive of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) informed the Committee that time is running out fast, as the 2012 admissions cycle is already under way. In fact, the deadline for applications for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science courses, as well as for the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, is 15 October 2011, and the deadline for the majority of other courses is 15 January 2012. Pupils in sixth form need to be deciding the next step in their educational journey now, and these financial considerations are central to the decision-making process. Currently, it is impossible for potential undergraduates to make informed choices as to where and what they will study, due to the uncertainties over

what level of tuition fee loan will be available through the Student Loans Company and what other maintenance support will be made available to them.

This morning, together with other Committee members, I met Minister Farry. I asked him to ensure that funding was available to maintain the excellence of Northern Ireland's education system, while ensuring that educational opportunity for all is maximised. The Minister has indicated that, unless fees are increased, either the universities will face severe cuts or the Department will be forced to drastically curtail its work in other areas.

Dr McDonnell: Has the Committee or the Minister had any investigation or study carried out of the economic cost of students being forced to go to England, Scotland or further afield for an education, with many of them not coming back to Northern Ireland?

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am sure that the Minister will address that in his response, so I will leave him to deal with the issue. However, the point is well made.

I will make a few comments now on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. One of the real issues that needs to be brought to the Assembly's attention is the comment by the First Minister in his statement to the Assembly after the successful Washington economic conference. He said:

"when the Executive start to look at their Budget and areas in which they have to look for cuts, they should use only a light touch — if they touch the Department for Employment and Learning at all — particularly in this area of expenditure, because it pays back dividends." [Official Report, Bound Volume 57, p30, col 1].

When I looked at the submission from the vice chancellor of the University of Ulster, I was struck by something that he said about that quotation. He alluded to the First Minister's comments about the light touch, but said:

"the fact is that it was given the heaviest touch of anywhere, with a £68 million per annum cut in the HE budget."

This must be addressed by the Executive and the Minister of Finance and Personnel. I could rehearse all the arguments put forward by the vice chancellors, but they are all on record in Hansard.

When I try to bring these matters to the attention of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, his usual retort is, "Where are we going to find the money?". We seem to spend a lot of time in this place going through the motions, and we do not get the time to talk about serious issues. This is arguably one of the most serious issues to face the Assembly.

If we are really stuck, one thing that we could do is merge our universities —

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

Mr B McCrea: — and our higher education authorities. That would show some form of administration, but that is a debate for another day.

Mr Ross: The motion is probably easy enough for everyone in the Assembly to support. However, it is the subtext, which we read as opposing any increase in fees but maintaining or increasing the funding available, that will give the Minister and, ultimately, his Executive colleagues more of a headache.

In his opening comments, the Chairman mentioned the importance of the issue to the economy. I am aware that there is a motion scheduled for tomorrow, tabled by the Chairpersons of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, that supports in principle the devolution of powers to allow the Assembly to lower the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. When companies across the world are looking to invest in a country or a region, there is no doubt that they look for a standout corporation tax rate. Beyond that, however, they look at other things. They look at the standard of the education system; at the quality of the universities; at the links between the universities and businesses; at the skills base; and at the quality of the graduates coming out of the universities. In its paper on the potential reduction of corporation tax, the Economic Advisory Group estimated that an additional 58,000 jobs could be created in Northern Ireland by 2030. That would be an additional 4,500 jobs a year in the first number of years, if we were to get that power. Therefore, it is very important that we continue to produce highly skilled graduates from quality universities to meet that demand from business.

It is important that we maintain the reputation of our universities so that we continue to attract international students, who come to Queen's or the University of Ulster because they know the quality of a UK university and the sort of education that they will get. Of course, the fees that they pay for that privilege are substantially higher than those for students from the United Kingdom.

It is a privilege to go to university, but university should not be just for the privileged. That is one of the key issues that will come out of this debate. Many are concerned that a further increase in student fees would be the tipping point for many families. On previous occasions, Members from across the House expressed grave concerns that we were heading towards a market approach to higher education that would lead, inevitably, to some students from less well-off backgrounds being priced out of the market. I do not believe that that is the sort of equality of opportunity that we want. It could lead to students making decisions about where and what to study on the basis of cost rather than academic considerations, as some universities and courses would be seen as cheaper options than others.

If, as looks likely, we make the decision not to raise fees, we are, in a way, marketing ourselves as somewhere where the cost of going to university is lower than in the rest of the United Kingdom. That raises a number of questions, a few of which the Chairperson raised in his opening comments. Would that attract more students from outside Northern Ireland to our universities? Would that mean that we could raise or scrap the maximum student number (MaSN) cap? What would the impact be on students from Northern Ireland if we were able to open up and have more students from elsewhere in the United Kingdom come to study here? Would there be an opportunity to freeze fees for students from Northern Ireland but raise them for those who come from elsewhere in the UK or beyond? Would there be protection so that a certain level of our university make-up was indigenous students from Northern Ireland? Those are questions that that would raise.

It is important to mention that Northern Ireland has a pretty good record when it comes to getting young people from disadvantaged areas into university. That is partly to do with our education system. I very much see academic selection and grammar schools as a driver

of social mobility and a means of helping many young people from areas of deprivation. However, it is also because universities, such as the University of Ulster, operate the Step-Up programme and work and develop links with many schools in which, traditionally, pupils have not gone on to university. The universities were able to raise that aspiration among young people. However, there is little point in raising that aspiration if, ultimately, the cost of going to university proves prohibitive for those students.

It is unrealistic to suggest that we can scrap student fees. Indeed, the potential return of a good degree and the job that may come with it should be viewed as a long-term investment. However, it is important that fees are not a deterrent to those from less well-off families. University entrance should be based on ability rather than on the affluence of an individual or an individual's parents.

That brings me to my key point. If we are to maintain funding for our universities so that we can cope with that additional and increasing demand for well-trained and skilled graduates and given the tighter public finances that we operate, how can we ensure that excellence is maintained? I do not think that there is a prospect of raising the cap on student fees for Northern Ireland. Therefore, if they make that decision, it is up to the Executive, collectively, to find elsewhere in the Budget —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Ross: I will conclude on this, Mr Deputy Speaker. If the Executive make that decision, it must be the collective agreement of the Executive as to where they can find additional money. There is also an onus on the universities to look for increasing private finance.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to state Sinn Féin's position: access to higher education must be based on the ability to learn and not on the ability to pay. Sinn Féin was opposed to the introduction of tuition fees and remains opposed to any notion of increasing tuition fees. It is wrong that the ability to pay for higher education should become the benchmark for accessing educational opportunity. Any increase in student fees at this time would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the people who could least afford it. It would be at the least another psychological obstacle to

students from low-income families and middle-income families and to those from socially deprived backgrounds. It would lead to more debt for students and their families and would lead to a two-tier third-level education system. I have spoken to young students from my community, and they have said that it would deter them from taking up higher education. We believe that education is a basic right and that a university campus should be a learning place not a market place.

The motion refers to the excellence of our universities here in the North. I accept that Queen's University and the University of Ulster have been relatively successful in widening participation. They are a key contributor to the economy, and they help to achieve strategic priorities set out, for example, in the Assembly's Programme for Government. Queen's University is, as it says, a magnet for talent. It harnesses global excellence for local purposes. I am a graduate myself, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Major investment in the university's new health campus is helping to bring about transformational change, and it is good to see the medical school at work. Development of the centres for cancer research and cell biology and for vision and microvascular sciences, and excellence in public health are some of the things that Queen's University is particularly proud of. The University of Ulster is also justifiably proud of its achievements. Three of its top subjects are biomedical sciences, with a Nobel laureate on the staff, nursing and Celtic studies. I have also visited the sports institute recently, and it continues to inspire young people and provide opportunities for young people in sport and education.

I support the bid to the Department for Employment and Learning for a relaxation of the MaSN figure for the University of Ulster's Magee campus in the north-west by over 1,000 in the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period because, when higher education is located in your local community, it is far more accessible.

The Committee is learning about the work of the seven other universities on this island and about the partnership that is Universities Ireland, and I want to see more working in partnership there.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He was quoting the work of

the Committee, and I noticed that he asked whether Queen's University had any idea how the Department for Employment and Learning's budget might be reconfigured. Does the Member have any knowledge or insight that he can put on that? I accept his statement about his party's position on tuition fees, but there is a funding gap of £40 million. Does he accept that there is a gap there? If so, is there any way that we might deal with it?

Mr McElduff: That is the £40 million question. That question was doing the rounds all day today at the showcase event in the Long Gallery. In a question for written answer, I asked the Minister to outline his Department's revenue generation proposals to offset any shortfall in the budget as a result of tuition fees not being increased.

The Minister said that it would inevitably lead to a reduction in services and training opportunities for young people and the unemployed were it to come about. I do not necessarily accept that.

5.00 pm

I agree with the Committee Chairman that this is an issue for the Department for Employment and Learning and a matter of great urgency for the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the wider Executive. That is where the answers need to come from. We cannot recurrently transfer that £40 million funding gap to students. I think that that is an issue for the wider Executive.

I will briefly restate my key points. Access to excellent universities is where Sinn Féin places its emphasis. We want people to be able to get to university on the basis not of their ability to pay but of their ability to learn. This hugely important issue requires urgent attention from the Department, the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the wider Executive.

Mr P Ramsey: I speak as the SDLP spokesperson on employment and learning and as a member of the Employment and Learning Committee. The motion, as outlined by the Chair, reflects the opinion of not only the Committee but those across the board from not just the business community but Queen's University, from whom Members will have heard at today's showcase event, and the University of Ulster, from whom we receive presentations on a regular basis. As we heard from the Chair, we are talking about the loss of 200 jobs at Queen's and 200 jobs at

the University of Ulster, with 200 of those 400 jobs being key academic posts.

The additional £40 million will have a catastrophic effect on higher education in Northern Ireland. We must ensure that we can afford to maintain our higher education system as best as possible in this time of austerity, while protecting, as Barry McElduff said, participation rates and ensuring that we do not price future generations out of higher education.

The financial position makes for stark reading. We all know the funding position that we have been given to work with in this comprehensive spending review period. The Department for Employment and Learning spends approximately £200 million on supporting universities and colleges and a further £200 million on supporting students with fees and loan expenses, which, when taken together, account for 50% of its budget. According to DEL, the aim of its higher education policy is:

“to promote and sustain the development of an internationally competitive higher education sector, accessible to all who are able to benefit and meeting the needs of the Northern Ireland economy and wider society.”

It is going to be extremely difficult for us and the Department to stay true to those words and that aim due to the further pressures on us from the Treasury to maximise opportunities and from the economic challenges going forward in this particularly difficult budgetary period. For me, the key phrase of that aim is:

“accessible to all who are able to benefit”.

We must ensure at all costs that those words continue to refer to educational achievement and not access based on income, as many Members said. If the latter were to happen, all the good work that has been undertaken to open up the system to those from poorer backgrounds will have been undone and will have failed. As I said earlier, we must protect participation rates in particular, which we know are best in the wider region. It is imperative that we balance any cuts with the ability to accommodate people who would not normally have had the opportunity to attend university.

The previous Member who spoke referred to the Magee campus, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for hosting a meeting with me and a number of key players from the University for Derry campaign so

early in his ministerial portfolio. It was a very positive meeting. The Magee campus issue is about regional disparity and about ensuring that people in sub-regions have access to third level education and higher education. It is an economic and a social argument, and it unites everyone in the city. No other subject matter, apart from the radiotherapy unit, has united people in the north-west as much as it has. We need and have received encouragement from the Minister, and we want to see that from the Executive, too. I say to other colleagues and parties in the Chamber that there are going to be increased demands from young people to meet the needs in both universities.

What will we do to try to facilitate those young people? We know that universities, particularly those in England, will charge the maximum £9,000 a year fee, and that that may deter a lot of people from going to university. We also know that there has been increasing demand for places in universities in Northern Ireland in recent years. During the meeting this morning, I asked the Minister how many young people were unable to gain a place at university as a result of that increased demand. There is no scientific approach for defining how many young people were affected, but many young people missed out on that opportunity and now form part of the NEET— not in employment, education or training — fraternity.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentioned Magee College and how important investment in that college is for access to higher education in the north-west. Does the Member agree that the six regional colleges deliver a significant proportion of our higher education provision and that investment in regional colleges is crucial in helping with access to higher education?

Mr P Ramsey: We must get the balance right. Across Northern Ireland, 40,000 young people find themselves in the NEET bracket and that is an issue that the previous Committee for Employment and Learning prioritised through an inquiry. Indeed, the former Chairperson of that Committee, Dolores Kelly, is sitting behind me, and she will also speak in this debate.

It is important that we recognise how difficult the situation is. There is no appetite among any of the political parties to increase student fees in Northern Ireland. The Chairperson of the Committee said that the challenge lies not just

with the Minister of Finance and Personnel but with all the Ministers, and I am sure that the Minister for Employment and Learning will also point that out. If we are serious about ensuring that future generations of young people have access to third-level education, the Executive will need to find the £40 million that is missing from the Department's budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: I encourage my colleagues from the other parties to ensure that we deliver on this issue and do not let future generations down.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to return to the debate. It is vitally important to thousands of families and to our regional economy that the Minister and the Executive act decisively on the issue of higher education funding. We know that the teaching and research capabilities of our universities are key drivers to economic recovery and that higher education changes lives. We must, therefore, call on the Executive to allocate adequate public funds to maintain our record of promoting social inclusion and the academic excellence necessary to produce the skilled workforce that is needed to grow our economy and to provide companies with the calibre of employees that they need to bring their investment to Northern Ireland.

My party had consistently opposed the situation in which people from low socio-economic backgrounds are deterred from going to university because of the cost. However, the Alliance Party recognises the serious pressure that is on our public finances and the need to consider the impact that fundamental changes in England will have on our universities.

Mr A Maginness: The Member has quite correctly referred to the need to protect the situation in which people from lower-income groups can go to university. However, the net effect of any substantial increase in fees will be that not only those from more deprived backgrounds but those from middle-income groups will be prevented from going to university. They simply will not be able to afford the substantial increase in fees.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I agree that the concern also stretches to middle-income groups. We must find a way to adequately resource higher education to safeguard their attendance at university.

We must also expand our understanding of how we deliver skills to our population. Although my party voted against uncapped tuition fees at Westminster, the Browne report contained a number of proposals that might help our universities to deliver more modern and efficient teaching. One recommendation of that report, which I welcome, is the extension of student finance arrangements to part-time students, particularly given the increasing number of students who must work to fund their study and the need to upskill workers who are already in the workforce.

Other modes of teaching such as two-year degrees, distance and virtual learning and, as has been mentioned, closer co-operation with further education colleges should also be considered.

The Alliance Party is committed to the fundamental principle that universities should be free at the point of delivery, that we protect access for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and that an appropriate financing system be put in place to ensure that our universities sustain their global competitive reputation. However, it is time for the Assembly to get real. The Department for Employment and Learning budget has a funding gap of approximately £40 million, so how else do we make the savings? That question has been asked today, but, to be honest, few answers have come back.

I continue to call on the Executive to take seriously the cost of division in Northern Ireland and the impact that failing to tackle that waste is having on our ability to invest in vital services such as education. The £40 million shortfall in the DEL budget pales in comparison with the estimated £1 billion cost of division every year. It is obviously not a saving that can be realised overnight and would also require fundamental change in our society. However, I hope that the absolute necessity to produce a highly skilled entrepreneurial population could be a catalyst for the Executive to work together and to target the long-term savings possible through a more shared and integrated society.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member think that the higher education sector has any part to play in the creation of an integrated society? Are there any opportunities to share or rationalise facilities in that sector?

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. That suggestion could certainly be considered. Our universities make unique offers on the subjects in which they have expertise, but there could be increased co-operation in research and innovation, and efficiency savings could be achieved in that way.

No Government in the world would seek to address the financial situation that we face through savings alone. My party has been open about the need to consider progressive revenue-raising measures. Devolved Administrations can make their own judgements about what they do with the block grant. The Welsh Government, for example, have decided to subsidise the fee increase imposed by Westminster. However, we have to recognise the fact that the Welsh people also pay prescription charges and water charges.

The time for electioneering is over, and it is time for the Assembly to deliver. As we stand here today, no student from Northern Ireland who seeks to study anywhere in the UK or Ireland in 2012 knows what fees they will have to pay. It is vital, therefore, that the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Executive provide direction before recess to allow families, students and institutions to plan for the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Lyttle: If rebalancing our economy, job creation and protecting the vulnerable in society are real priorities of the Executive, they have to allocate the resources needed to achieve those aims.

Mr D McIlveen: Obviously, this issue is hugely involved and emotive. In my short time in the Assembly, I have not been lobbied so heavily about any other matter. It is clearly an issue. I have been contacted by constituents and representatives from our higher education and further education sectors and various focus groups that, at times, have given analyses that are poles apart. Given that public interest in the topic is so high, it was particularly disappointing to hear one of the members of the Committee for Employment and Learning describe that Committee as being one that does not matter. I hope that the said Member will lower himself to take part in today's debate. Hopefully, he will join us in the Chamber before much longer.

Our party position on tuition fees has been crystal clear. We are convinced that to raise the fees charged to students in Northern

Ireland beyond £3,290 outside inflation is not a constructive way forward. There are many reasons for that, but I will highlight just a couple. First, if our economy is to prosper, we must ensure that every opportunity is given to nurturing our home-grown talent. The message that we got on the doors leading up to the election was that many parents would be very reluctant to send their children to university if the fees were to be increased.

5.15 pm

The argument is well rehearsed that, even if fees are increased, university is still free at the point of entry. However, we cannot ignore the fact that debt is debt, and for graduates to be shackled by vast debts before they have their first full-time job is both uninspiring and demotivating.

Another reason to oppose a rise in fees is that, for the first time in a generation, we can fight the brain drain from which Northern Ireland has suffered. In a recent survey commissioned by the Consumer Council, it was found that over 80% of graduates live within 20 miles of where they studied. It is well known that many of our brightest students left Northern Ireland to study in other UK universities, never to return. It is expected that most of the other Russell Group universities will take full advantage of the lifting of the cap on fees in mainland UK.

Therefore, by setting our fees at the current level, we can compete and do what we can to keep our academic talent in Northern Ireland, and that can only be a good thing for the economy.

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I have listened carefully to his argument, as I did that of Mr Barry McElduff. Both arguments are similar in their opposition to increases in fees. However, I think that I saw Mr McIlveen go through the Aye Lobby about an hour ago to vote in favour of the Budget. Mr Barry McElduff also went through that Lobby, voting for a Budget that prevents the Department from expending the money that is necessary for the universities to provide for their students and services. Will the Member explain how he can reconcile that contradiction?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. If he will permit me to continue, that point will be covered in less than a few moments.

Over £28 million of efficiencies have already been absorbed by the sector, and if a further hit of £40 million a year is to be taken in, it will only come about in one of two ways: money going in or less money going out. I applaud the work that our universities and colleges have done and where legitimate efficiencies can be made, they should continue to make them.

However, in the Assembly, there is a job to do to ensure that that insurmountable gap is plugged. It will not be easy, and there is no single solution to the problem of accumulating the £40 million that the universities and colleges need to meet their annual shortfall. First, there is an obligation on the businesses that benefit from the incredible skills that our universities offer to pay a little more to fill the gaps that exist in the budget. Secondly, we should lift the cap on fees for the universities but ensure that it is set in law that a rise in fees is not inflicted on our indigenous students. Thirdly, universities may have to endure some further efficiencies.

I speak directly to the Minister. Our world-class education is worth paying for, and, as such, I appeal to you not to leave the Executive table until you get the money you need to ensure that our universities are funded.

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Cathal Ó hOisín, so I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech be heard without interruption.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is mór an onóir domhsa a bheith anseo inniu ar son daoine bródúla Dhoire Thoir. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt dóibh ag an am seo.

I am accorded liberties on this occasion that I will not be again; liberties, indeed, that I sometimes do not have even in my own house. I intend to take advantage of them. I may digress somewhat from the subject matter, but my remarks will be interconnected.

I want to thank the proud people of East Derry, republican and otherwise, who sent me to this place. I also thank our party structures, an chomhairle ceantair, and the local cumanns, particularly the O'Carolan/Kilmartin Cumann in Dungiven. I thank my family for their sacrifice and for the support they have given me, particularly my wife, Eileen, and my son, Peadar. As I said before, I thank all those from

Coolnamonan, Clontygerach, Tamlaght Finlagan, Tamlaghtard and elsewhere.

Another person I thank is the Member previously elected to this place, Francie Brolly.

Francie Brolly is a political mentor of mine; more than that, he is a neighbour, a friend, a comrade and a teacher. Francie imparted to me the radical revolutionary tradition of the United Irishmen: the unification of Catholic, Protestant and dissenter by the common name of Irishmen, and its central tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity through song and story and through the realisation of great Irishmen and, indeed, great Ulstermen, such as Henry Joy McCracken, Roddy McCorley and my fellow Dungiven man, John Mitchel.

Francie also imparted to me the legends of Lig na Peiste and Coeey na Gall, Queen Meadhbh and the Fianna. I believe that those should appear on all primary-school curricula. He also imparted a grá for an teanga bheo, our own native language, which has remained with me all this time. Francie's involvement in many campaigns at home is legend, as is that of the rest of my party.

A burning issue for our area, for the constituency, and indeed for the entire north-west is the Dungiven bypass, and I welcome the fact that the public inquiry will begin at the start of next year. I hope that construction work will start as soon as possible afterwards. The previous Minister identified moneys for it, and the process of decoupling the bypass is under way. I also welcome the upgrading of the Derry to Coleraine railway line and realise the essential nature of the infrastructure there in regeneration. Regeneration is an issue for Coleraine, Limavady, Dungiven and all the smaller villages across the constituency, as you well know, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The jobs and immigration issues that affect our constituency are legend. I was speaking to a couple at the weekend who were attending a leaving party for two 2:1 graduates, a man and his wife who were emigrating to Australia; she to work as a nanny and he to work for a landscape gardening company. Those people are lost to us if we let them go.

We need to look at the tourism product in our area; the opening up of Benone, the Binevenagh area of outstanding natural beauty, the Sperrins tourism issue, the preservation of the

Greencastle to Magilligan ferry, and the widening of the City of Culture bid in 2013, where we hopefully may welcome fleá cheoil na hÉireann. We also have the Ulster fleá in Dungiven in the next couple of years.

We need to look at the redevelopment of the Shackleton complex in the hope that the recreational and educational facilities and infrastructure there can be used to maximum effect.

The previous incumbent, Billy Leonard, touched on the Coleraine to Limerick waterway on occasions. I had the opportunity last week to talk to Waterways Ireland about the increase in the delivery of that project: £34 million was spent by people visiting waterways in Ireland last year.

We would like to benefit in the wider north-west area from the high-tech jobs that will come with Project Kelvin. In that respect, the research and development capacity of the University of Ulster at Coleraine and Magee will be essential, as will the work with the Causeway and Altnagelvin hospitals.

As my colleagues mentioned, there should be increased co-operation with the seven other universities under Universities Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Ó hOisín: I am sorry?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ó hOisín: OK. Thank you. The equality issues of the United Irishmen come to the fore once again. Equality of jobs, services, housing and education —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Ó hOisín: We want to avoid the inequalities of unfair transfer tests, elitist schools and the inequalities that would be created through an increase in tuition fees. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Basil McCrea, for bringing the debate to the Chamber. It is very important, and I welcome the opportunity to participate.

Throughout the election campaign and in the Programme for Government, the economy has been central to our theme for the future. The

need to improve our economy in Northern Ireland has been our focus, and integral to that is growing the private sector. The DEL Committee heard representations from various bodies, and changing the focus to the science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects has been very important.

We need to ensure that the universities have the ability to promote economic growth. We heard from the universities and the Committee for Employment and Learning, and it has been proven that higher education makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy, directly in bringing over 12,000 jobs and £1.5 billion to the economy, and indirectly in providing highly skilled graduates, attracting inward investment and as a director of innovation. As a past student, I also add my support to extending the University of Ulster's Magee campus.

The skills of the workforce are a major selling point of Northern Ireland. We will be debating corporation tax tomorrow, and the contribution that the higher education sector makes to the Northern Ireland economy is important to that. No one should be priced out of education. The previous Ministers for Employment and Learning succeeded in getting the highest proportion of students from deprived backgrounds into higher education. I hope that continues with our new Minister.

Other Members went through the details of the DEL budget, and I do not intend to go through that again except to say that the universities must be applauded in being prepared to meet the £28 million in efficiencies. However, that £28 million in efficiencies does not take into account inflation, VAT, National Insurance, etc, so the universities will have to meet additional efficiencies, and it will be very difficult for them to do that. So, the additional £40 million in cuts will, as the universities said, be catastrophic for them, and we must take into consideration all the details of what the universities told us about that with regard to the loss of jobs, etc.

The Ulster Unionist Party has always said that it is committed to ensuring that higher education remains accessible to everyone, regardless of ability to pay.

I welcomed the opportunity to speak to people from Queen's University in the Long Gallery today. It was interesting hearing exactly how they contribute to the Northern Ireland economy. They explained that, because the fees in GB

have already risen to £9,000, they now have an important buying power. The universities here are already seeing some of their staff being brought across to GB. That is another consideration, so the timing of the Minister's decision is important, and I urge him to make it as soon as possible.

Welfare reform means that a large number of people will be moving from incapacity benefit to jobseeker's allowance. So, the Department for Employment and Learning will need more finance for job support programmes, which will be an additional burden for the Minister.

I urge the Minister to take all those considerations on board, look at the timing of his decision and bring it to the Assembly as soon as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs D Kelly: I congratulate the Committee for highlighting this important subject for debate before the summer recess. Unfortunately, we are engaged in yet another debate in the absence of a Programme for Government. I am sure the Minister will feel somewhat constrained, given that he does not, I take it, have any indication as yet from his Executive colleagues about the £40 million that is required by his Department to ensure that there is no increase in tuition fees, which would enable all the parties that made manifesto commitments during the election to live up to them.

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

I noted with interest that the First Minister stated that no rise in tuition fees and an additional £40 million for the Department for Employment and Learning was a price worth paying. Let us hope that that is one promise that the DUP and others live up to.

5.30 pm

I urge the Alliance Party to look with some level of fear and trepidation to the experience of their Lib Dem colleagues across the water. They paid the price for the rise in tuition fees and the breaking of their electoral manifesto promises. It is also worth putting on record that the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the DUP all voted against tuition fees at Westminster, so, hopefully, they believe that what is good enough for students in GB will also be good enough for students here in the North.

People have said many times that devolution must work for the people of the North, and this is one example of where it clearly should. Wales and Scotland introduced and legislated for different fee income structures in their respective jurisdictions, and that ought to be the case here in the North. However, I am conscious that the shape and make-up of students here does not allow the same level of flexibility as in, for example, Wales, in that far fewer students come to study here in the North compared with Wales. I am also conscious of the fact that tuition fees should not be debated in isolation from other rising costs, such as maintenance and living costs. Those must also be factored into the consideration.

Earlier in the year, Joanne Stuart's review and the Browne review were published. The Stuart report recognised that fees and student loans are not paid upfront but are paid off much later, when students start to earn over £15,000. The review said that that requirement should not kick in until they start to earn £21,000, which is an uplift. Nonetheless, Joanne Stuart's report recognised that families here in Northern Ireland were very fearful and mindful of debt and did not like entering into huge debts. The argument that you do not pay until later did not wear well with people here who wish to study.

Other Members who contributed to the debate had the opportunity to visit, and thus refer to, the Queen's University's exhibition in the Long Gallery. Not only is Queen's the leading university here in the North, it also a world leader in many different areas and subjects, from agrifood, cancer research and waste management to initiatives supporting communities and, indeed, international development. The range and skill of the teaching and research staff are enviable, not only at Queen's but at the University of Ulster, and, indeed, our teaching universities.

It is difficult to divorce how other commentators, such as Declan Kelly, when jobs for Derry were announced earlier in the year —

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

Mrs D Kelly: — referred to the workforce —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will indeed.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member tell us what Declan had to say?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs D Kelly: Now that I have a minute to tell you, I will. Thank you very much, Mr McCrea. Declan Kelly clearly said — as have others who invested in the economy here in the North — that one of the main overriding factors for any investor was our skilled workforce. I have heard the First Minister and deputy First Minister paraphrase that statement in a number of debates. I have also heard others use it, so we should all bear that in mind.

How we can ever separate tuition fees and the number of places available in our universities from the economy is beyond me. It would be inexplicable to many families and to young people hoping to go to university.

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

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing the matter to the House.

I wish to make two points: one academic and one economic. We all know that the previous Assembly and its Executive Committee put the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government. There is no reason to believe that it will not be the same this time around. Within that, there is the medium- to long-term ambition of rebalancing the economy. We will know that we have succeeded only when our people enjoy the sort of prosperity that is the UK average and when we deliver the sort of productivity that is measured in gross value added that, again, reflects something close to the average around the United Kingdom.

To achieve that, we will need many drivers and engines, and among them will be our universities. They must achieve two things. First, they must continue to analyse global markets, look at the trends and identify niche markets, and develop spin-out companies. I will not rehearse the figures detailing the number of companies, the employment or the wealth generated, because those are all well documented.

Secondly, they must achieve a reduction in corporation tax, if and when we get it and deploy

it to effect in order to transform our private sector. There will be a need for an ever-widening pipeline delivering educated workers into the private sector. Mr Ross, I believe, has already referred to the numbers — 4,000 to 5,000 per annum. Woe betide the Northern Ireland economy if we fail in that and the pipeline dries up, because we will be sending a message around the world not that Northern Ireland is open for business but is shut. Getting people into our universities is not about satisfying those who can afford to pay for their education. Rather, it is about making sure that we get into university those whom our economy cannot afford not to educate.

I am in no doubt that we are looking at a very competitive world, particularly when it comes to the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Some years ago, I had the pleasure of facilitating some of the STEM workshops that were organised jointly by DEL and the Department of Education. One speaker made a point that has stuck with me, and it is this: every 10 years, China and India alone produce 65 million new scientists, which is the equivalent of the entire population of the United Kingdom. To compete, we need to throw all the resources that we can into that area. It emphasises to me the importance of proposals such as turning the Magee campus of the University of Ulster into an area of expertise for STEM subjects and associated goods.

I come seamlessly to the academic point with a reference to the new library at Queen's University. A library, of course, is the epicentre of academic study. However, this new library was funded by and named after perhaps Northern Ireland's greatest industrialist of his generation, Sir Allen McClay. It was made clear in evidence given by the registrar of Queen's University to the Committee for Employment and Learning last week that, if the two universities are to absorb not just the £28 million of efficiency savings to which they have already committed but the additional £40 million shortfall, Queen's University, in order to take that additional £20 million hit on funding, would have to take out two of its faculties. The university's registrar and chief operating officer, Mr O'Kane, made clear what that would mean. He told the Committee:

"We would have to take out our faculty of arts and humanities and the faculty of social sciences."

Can we really imagine not investing in trying to locate, foster and make the most of the next Hewitt or Heaney, or the next historian of the calibre of Jonathan Bardon? That to me is just unimaginable. We must find that money. If we do not find it, it might be a good thing that we do not have any new historians coming out of the universities, because, if we decide not to fund our universities properly, a historian would certainly look at that and would identify the crime and identify the guilty as Members of the House. I support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: I rise to speak as the Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It seems ironic that, today, Queen's University has come here to showcase the university and to explain to Members the wide range of services and academic disciplines that are available in the university, as well as its great value to Northern Ireland, not just in academic but in economic terms. It seems logical and reasonable to say that, without our universities, we would be much poorer not just in learning but in our economic performance. It is important, therefore, that the message goes out from the Assembly that we regard the universities not just as centres of learning but as economic drivers in our community. I believe that universities should be places not only of learning but should feature largely in shaping and forming our economy and in helping us out of the economic depression that we are in. So, if we do not invest in our universities, we will not be investing properly in our economy. That is the message that should go out from this debate.

To some extent, the argument about university fees is historic. I and my party are against university fees, but we have to accept the reality that they are there. Although the vast majority of people thole university fees, they certainly do not welcome them and would love to be rid of them. However, if we increase them to an unacceptably high level, which is what will happen if we do not plug the £40 million university funding gap, we will certainly discourage school pupils from applying to our universities. There is no doubt that there would be a fall-off in student numbers.

In other countries in the European Union, there are no fees for university students, or, if there are, they are kept to a basic minimum. For example, the Netherlands provides high quality science and technology-based courses through the medium of English that are largely free. Will

our students be going to Holland to study? We must encourage indigenous students to stay here to study. If we do not, we will be, in effect, damaging our economy.

In the South, although students pay a registration fee, they do not pay tuition fees. There are a lot of differences between North and South. In many respects, such as with air passenger duty and corporation tax, the competitive edge is in favour of the South. Are we now to create another inequality between North and South that will be to our disadvantage? We must address that issue. We must urge the Executive to find the money that is necessary to plug the university funding gap. If we do not, we will be damaging our economy. That is the message that must go out from here today, and I hope that everyone in the Chamber will endorse it.

5.45 pm

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the debate and the fact that the vast majority of parties in the Assembly sought a mandate that prevented them from placing a further burden on potential university students and their families. It basically said to the people of this region that we would not ask students to pay for the shortfall in the funding of universities and higher education. Today, however, two of the parties that made that commitment have voted through a Budget that continues to place uncertainty on whether students could end up having to pay for the shortfall in university funding. I do not understand how that is possible. I do not understand how you can make a commitment in your manifesto not to increase fees and then, within five weeks of the new Assembly taking power, vote through a Budget that continues to place a fundamental question over those fees.

The Minister, to his credit, has been slightly less than certain about university fees. He has been indifferent about whether university fees should remain at the current level. That may be a position that he feels able to justify politically; I am sure that he can. However, it is not the will of the people of this region. Nor, I suggest, is it the true will of those whom they sent to this House. In the coming weeks, it is essential that we find a way of plugging the shortfall in university funding without placing a further burden on working families and young adults whose only ambition is to try to further themselves in the world.

Universities do two things: they teach undergraduates and postgraduates and they research. For some bizarre reason, we see those as the same function. They are not. As Member after Member has highlighted, the teaching part of a university is quite distinct from the research function, which is a fundamental part of economic strategy. It adds value to our economy. An entirely different type of academic is attracted to it. The teaching function prepares the ground for the decades ahead. It provides those who seek to enhance their professional qualifications or knowledge with the ability to do so.

In the previous mandate, we received a very important piece of advice from a man who runs a university. We invited him to chair the independent review of economic policy. Professor Richard Barnett said that we need to stop seeing universities as something that you fund as a whole and get outputs from as if it were all the same. He said that we need to start seeing them as what they are: diverse and complex organisations that perform a multitude of functions on our behalf. Those functions are educational, social, historical and key, economic functions.

We made a manifesto commitment to create a Department for the economy. We said that it was time to stop thinking about whether DEL, as it is currently constituted, is able to meet the needs of our economy and students and start facing up to the reality that it probably is not. I will not ask the Minister to respond to that. He has to be the Minister for what he is; the Department for Employment and Learning. However, it is particularly important that we stop the dance of the seven veils only five days before students will be asked to fill out their application forms for university next year and start introducing some certainty into the argument.

I want to hear from the Minister a firm commitment that no increase in university fees means just that. I want to hear from the House a commitment that the shortfall will be found.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he recognise that we ask students to enter into a social contract to go to university, study and get a degree so that they can contribute to our economy, yet we have failed to provide them with jobs at the other end?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank Mrs Kelly for her contribution. The disconnection in our economic planning is nowhere more evident than in this debate. It lays bare for all to see how disconnected our economic planning is in this region. We can begin to address that by making the basic decisions that will allow us to plan the next five or 10 years. The first one that we have to make is the basic decision that there will be no increase in tuition fees; we will not close the door of access.

The second one is to say that, in not increasing, we are not saying that universities must get by on less. In fact, we need to say the opposite, which is that we will find the money to make sure that universities can be the economic generators that we need them to be and that innovation and research can continue to be not at the heart of the propagandising that we do when we leave these shores to try to get inward investment but at the heart of what we are and of the type of economy that we would like to be.

Mr Agnew: I declare an interest as a former student who has a debt in the region of £16,000. I do not want the next generation of students to look at my generation and say that those were the glory days. It would be a sad state of affairs if we were to see a figure of £16,000 as a manageable debt to start your adult life with.

Like many others, I am concerned by the attitude of parties that voted today for a Budget that leaves funding for higher education short. Indeed, the Minister and his party voted for a Budget that he accepts leaves his Department having to work on the assumption that fees will rise because there is no room in his budget to find funding elsewhere. In its manifesto, his party committed to no unfair rise in tuition fees. I suspect that, with that commitment, it learnt a little from its sister party, the Liberal Democrats, which unequivocally opposed a rise in tuition fees and then voted in Parliament for such a rise. I hope that the Minister will not try to use the word "unfair" as a back door out of the issue. He may deem it a fair rise to increase the fees to £4,500 or maybe more, but I do not, and I suspect that a lot of the people who voted for his party would not see that as a fair rise.

Equally, the DUP and Sinn Féin voted for the Budget today yet committed in their manifestoes not to increase fees. I suspect that they did

that, knowing, as they went into the election, that they would never take on the Department for Employment and Learning. They left the Alliance Party with the Ministry that was last pick. I hope that they will prove me wrong and show a genuine commitment to the issue. I hope that they will work together in the Executive and in the Budget review group to find the money that is needed to plug the gap in higher education funding and ensure that fees remain at their current level and that students do not have to bear an increase.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. If the DUP's tactic was to say that we would not increase student fees and then not take the Ministry, it would have been a pretty stupid one, given that we were hopeful that we would still have the Finance Ministry. Will the Member agree that, if a collective Executive decision is taken not to increase student fees, it will be up to the Executive collectively to find that funding? I can assure him that our party will not shy away from that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I hope that, when the decision is taken and whatever it is, there will be collective responsibility. I will remember his remarks.

It has been stated time and again that the Executive are focused on growing the economy. I and my party believe that funding further and higher education should be a first step in that process, not merely an afterthought after rushing headlong into a cut in corporation tax. My views on corporation tax are well known. If we can find anywhere between £200 million and £400 million a year to make up the loss that would result from reducing corporation tax, we absolutely can and should find the £40 million needed to plug the gap in higher education funding.

I want to make one further point about our higher education system. In GB, the argument has become very narrow, focusing solely on the function of universities as an economic driver. Although there is no doubt that that is an important role of our universities, we would be a much poorer society, as Mr Nesbitt pointed out, if we lost our arts, humanities and social science departments. If we are to ensure a rounded society, our universities must be rounded. I was the beneficiary of a humanities degree, and I

hope that it has served me well. I will let other Members judge that for themselves.

I was the first member of my family to have the privilege of receiving a university education. That was due to a policy of widening access beyond the privileged classes. If we increase fees, I fear that we will put that policy at risk.

Mrs McKeivitt: As stated in our manifesto, the SDLP will continue to oppose any increase in university tuition fees. We will not allow others to attempt to take society back to a time when only the well-off could go to university. We will remain committed to ensuring that education is fairly based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. Everything else has been said.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I am almost tempted to be equally brief and leave everyone hanging. I am very grateful to Mr McCrea and the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing the issue before the Assembly and for the opportunity to respond to the debate. I have no doubt that it is a debate in which there is much interest across Northern Ireland, not least from the universities and current or prospective students and their families. I would also like to express my gratitude to members of the Committee who met me this morning to discuss the issue in more detail and to express their views on some of the complex issues that we face. I am also grateful to Members for their comments during the debate.

While I am on the subject of gratitude, I want to make it clear that I am very pleased to be standing here as the Minister for Employment and Learning. There is a notion that, in some way, the Department for Employment and Learning was a poisoned chalice that was left to the very end of the d'Hondt process and that the poor old Alliance Party was left to pick it up. I want to be very clear: when my party qualified for a ministerial position under the d'Hondt formula, this was the Department that we wanted. It worked out extremely well that other parties did not choose it.

We wanted this Department because it lies at the heart of the engine room of Northern Ireland's economy. What happens through this Department will make a huge difference to the transformation of the economy over the next decade. It is all about skills across a very broad spectrum, from dealing with basic numeracy and literacy issues, through essential skills, to what

happens with our universities and producing high-quality graduates and postgraduates. What we have to do spans a very broad front, and there is a broad and exciting agenda in employment and learning. How we act on tuition fees is only one part of the landscape of issues that the Department faces, and there are huge opportunities in everything that we can do.

I return to today's debate, which is primarily about the funding of the higher education system in Northern Ireland. Perhaps inevitably, given the stage that we are at, a lot of comments have been made on the future of tuition fees. I will come to that shortly.

6.00 pm

First, however, it is important that I provide some contextual information on the budgetary situation that the Department for Employment and Learning faces. The Department needs to achieve savings of £150 million annually by 2014-15, some £68 million of which is to come from higher education. The universities will contribute £28 million in cash savings over the next two years, which will be met through a 12% reduction in teaching and research grants. In addition, the higher education sector is addressing internal pressures associated with, for example, pay and price inflation and VAT and is absorbing other reductions in income associated with cessation of or reduction to specific funding streams for innovation and research. That leaves a balance of £40 million annually by 2014 that has to be found from other measures. An increase in tuition fees to about £4,500 would be one way of addressing the shortfall but, clearly, would not be a popular approach. However, to be clear, as things stand, that is what the budget in my Department is premised on.

DEL is not immune to the cuts in the block grant. In these austere times, there is a role for government, taxpayers and individual service users that needs to be reflected in future policy and funding decisions. However, it is important that the Assembly recognise the economic importance of investing in higher education in general and, specifically, in supporting efforts to raise the skill levels of the population. It is recognised that Northern Ireland is at an economic crossroads. Continued access to education and training and efforts to raise the skill levels of the population are crucial to

ensuring that we take the path to economic recovery and economic growth.

I am acutely aware that the future of skills delivery centres around much more than the debate on student fees. Changing demographics and the lifelong learning agenda mean that the future of the education and skills landscape is likely to be significantly different from the one that we are familiar with. Nevertheless, the need to address a shortfall in the budget and to provide clarity to families, students and institutions necessitates a focusing of my efforts on the student fee issue.

Before that, however, I want to reflect on an aspect of today's motion that is a key issue for all of us: how do we maximise education opportunities for all? Widening participation in higher education to students from groups that are under-represented is one of my Department's key strategic goals. In particular, our focus is on students from low-income backgrounds and those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Our vision for widening participation is that any qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to a higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background.

At just over 50%, we now have the highest participation rate of any area of the United Kingdom. In addition, we have the best record in the UK of attracting students from low-income backgrounds to higher education. Therefore, we have already been very successful. However, we recognise the need to do more. I am committed to developing a new approach to widening participation in Northern Ireland. It is based on a future vision of the sector in which the people who are most able but least likely to participate in higher education are given every encouragement and support to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to and benefit from the higher education that is right for them. The implementation of the new widening participation strategy will be a key element in ensuring that university education will continue to be accessible and affordable to people from all economic backgrounds.

I will move on to tuition fees and funding. Members will be aware that my Department's consultation on tuition fees and student finance arrangements in general concluded recently. We must urgently determine and communicate fee levels and support arrangements for entry in

September 2012 to prospective students, their parents, the institutions and other key stakeholders. Therefore, the final decisions must be made by September 2011 to provide that clarity. Clarity will also provide me with a firm course of action for the wide range of other priorities that are supported by my Department. Although any change to fee levels will affect only those entering higher education in or after 2012, the legislative, operational and other requirements mean that agreed decisions need to be communicated to key stakeholders almost one year in advance of the academic year in which they are due to take effect to enable them to undertake the necessary preparations and other activity. Our universities and colleges need to be able to set and include fee levels in their prospectus documentation. The Student Loans Company and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs need to devise the required IT and communication infrastructure for the new cohorts of students, and all the public bodies involved need to prepare tailored guidance booklets, application forms and online information for prospective students and their families.

The Universities and Colleges Admission Service will be open for applications from September. The deadline for courses such as medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, as well as for Cambridge and Oxford courses, is 15 October. The deadline for the majority of other courses is 15 January 2012. Financial considerations are an important part of the decision-making process for all applicants, and it is critical that we are in a position to tell our future students what fees will apply and what support will be available. For those reasons, the fee levels for 2012 and whether there is to be an inflationary or above-inflation uplift need to be reflected in the relevant subordinate legislation in September 2011.

The issue of fees is inextricably linked to my Department's budget, and I intend to table a paper to the Executive within the next few days that will, in part, reflect the outcome of the debate. That paper will set out the potential options for addressing the £40 million budget shortfall and the consequences of those options. It would not be appropriate of me to rehearse exactly what that paper to the Executive will say, but I want to give some sense of its likely content because it is relevant to today's debate.

As I said, one option for moving forward is for fees to be increased to £4,500. Indeed, the

current budget is premised on that. However, an above-inflation increase requires the Assembly to endorse such an approach by way of a vote on the relevant legislation. Arguments in favour of an increase in fees will be reflected in the paper to be presented. It is clear from the debate that there is limited or no support for an approach based on an increase in fees.

If fees are not increased, the Department will face a recurring funding shortfall of some £40 million a year by 2014-15. Therefore, other options must be considered, including passing the shortfall on to universities and asking the higher education sector to absorb it. An alternative option is to find the money by reducing investment and other services offered by my Department. Finally, additional resources could be sought from the Executive.

As I said to the House during recent Question Times, passing the £40 million funding gap on to universities would have a catastrophic consequence for them and would most likely result in a reduction in the number of students and the closure of university departments. It would mean reducing the institutions' annual block grant by 50% in real terms by 2014-15. Although there may be a block grant reduction of around 80% in England, it should be noted that that will be offset for English institutions by increased fees of up to £9,000.

Our local higher education institutions are already being asked to contribute a 12% reduction — some £28 million — in their funding and to bear the cost of inescapable pressures and the effects of inflation. Those additional pressures are estimated to cost in excess of £20 million a year. So, overall, we are talking about a real reduction in funding of £90 million to £100 million: the equivalent to the funding for one of our universities in its entirety. The viability of our universities and colleges would be threatened, and it would be difficult for us to sustain an argument that we have world-class facilities.

As well as a significant reduction in our local capacity, many more students would go to Great Britain for their education, the cost of which would still fall to the Northern Ireland block. In effect, we would be financing the brain drain, which is utterly self-defeating. All this comes at a time when we are trying to give out a message that Northern Ireland is open for business, that we can grow our own local companies and that

we can attract companies from overseas. Such companies will be looking for a guarantee that we have a highly skilled workforce. That includes highly skilled graduates of our local universities. The result would be a smaller and second-rate higher education system for Northern Ireland.

If my Department is asked to bear the cost, I would have to take £40 million from other programmes, which would have serious consequences for other aspects of our budget. The employment service is already overstretched. It is configured to deal with a jobseeker's allowance headcount of 35,000 per annum, but 60,000 people are on the books at present, with a further 20,000 to come across as a result of the migration from incapacity benefit under welfare reforms.

It is crucial for Members to reflect on the fact that DEL is not solely the Department for higher education. My Department supports and funds a range of areas, such as further education, apprenticeships, essential skills training and employer skills engagement, all of which address the twin goals of economic growth and social mobility and some of which have a particular impact on addressing social disadvantage. The prioritisation of academic education over vocational education or of higher education over initiatives to address social disadvantage would be counterproductive to the wider priorities of the Assembly.

A further option is for the Executive to provide additional recurrent resources to my Department's baseline to address the shortfall. That would avoid an increase in fees and the damaging cuts to universities or the other DEL programmes that I mentioned. I am aware that my Executive colleagues and their Departments also face significant financial challenges. However, the development of the economy is an overarching and key strategic priority for the Executive. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of higher education to our economy and our future.

Members will be aware that our universities are the major suppliers of research in Northern Ireland. They play a vital role in supporting the economy through the production of high-quality research and translating that research into markets through knowledge transfer. That has been recognised through the work of MATRIX, the Northern Ireland science industry panel. Our universities are recognised nationally and internationally for world-class research and development. They performed extremely well in the most recent research assessment exercise

in 2008, which showed that half the assessed research in Northern Ireland is rated as internationally excellent or world-leading and that more than 98% of Northern Ireland's researchers work in disciplines in which world-leading research is taking place. As we approach the next assessment, in 2014, I want to ensure that that research quality is maintained.

In the coming academic year, recurrent research funding in the two universities will reduce by 6% compared with the 2010-11 academic year, and a similar reduction will have to be delivered next year. That is in stark contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom, where recurrent research funding has largely been protected and ring-fenced. It is critical that I am able to maintain the funding of research at an appropriate level to enable our universities to fulfil their central role of developing and sustaining a world-class research base in Northern Ireland. The core funding provided by my Department drives research excellence and enables the universities to bid for grants for specific projects from the UK research councils, the European Union, charities, other Departments and industry. Therefore, the public funding that we provide to universities is critical in leveraging those additional resources. In the absence of that public support, there is no prospect of those other forms of finance picking up any shortfall.

In conclusion, I will respond to the comments made by Members during the debate. There was some talk about the impact on student flows and the MaSN cap in Northern Ireland. It is worth recognising that the whole range of political parties and the University of Ulster in particular have a strong interest in an increased MaSN. A host of unintended consequences, some welcome and others not so welcome, may arise from our decision on student fees. There will be a desire and a pressure for more Northern Ireland students to study locally, when they look at the fees regime elsewhere in the UK. It is important that we are able to respond to that demand. It is critical that my Department looks at the issue of MaSN.

6.15 pm

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister accept that many students want to study locally for the first two years of a degree and it is, therefore, important that consideration is given to increasing the MaSN and caps in the FE colleges that provide higher education?

Dr Farry: We are very mindful of the desire for people to study locally. We are also particularly aware that this is an issue not only for higher

education institutions but for further education. Higher education through further education is an important theme that we will be developing through the forthcoming higher education strategy.

Reference has also been made to the expansion of Magee. That is an issue for the University of Ulster to take forward as an independent body. However, if we are in a position to look at MaSNs, that may well be something that can happen on the back of that.

I also want to stress that whatever we do about fees will carry policy risks. We can sit here and take decisions, but students will vote with their feet, and they may move in unanticipated ways. We will have to be mindful and monitor what happens with regard to those flows and take action. No doubt, the paper that I will present to the Executive will set out what can be anticipated in those areas and some of the measures that will have to be taken to mitigate some of those responses.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister assure the House that he will impress on his Executive colleagues how important it is that the standard of lecturing, teaching and research in our universities is maintained to the highest possible level?

Dr Farry: I fully concur with the remarks from the Chairman of the Committee; that is a critical issue. It is something that both universities are very alert to.

In conclusion, I thank Mr McCrea and the Committee for bringing the issue to the House. I am bringing a paper to the Executive forthwith, with a view to addressing the issue and giving clarity to all the stakeholders.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I welcome the debate that has taken place in the House this evening and the many contributions to it. It is clear from the debate that Members have reflected the passionate concerns of all the stakeholders involved. The stakeholders include not only corporate entities, such as the universities and Departments, but the young people who are reaching the brink of adulthood and are seeking to find a career path and the educational experience that they require to equip them for the future. Also among the stakeholders are the parents who are concerned about their future financial ability to have their children educated, if there is to be that financial burden on them.

It is a role of the Committee for Employment and Learning to ensure that all avenues have been explored, so that those young people are able to progress into higher education on the basis of their academic ability and regardless of their parents' income or background. Equally, the Committee is mindful of the benefits enjoyed by graduates, who have had an opportunity to access a higher level of education, and the fact that young people who have taken a different career path may well be contributing, through their taxes, to the support of students in higher and further education.

All Members are mindful of the £40 million deficit. The collective view that has emerged from around the House is that we cannot fail our students in this matter; we must find a way around this difficulty. I believe that that can be done collectively in the Executive. That is why most of the Members who spoke today urged the Minister to make sure that he takes this matter to the Executive table and remains at the Executive table until such times as a resolution is found. Again, that is a challenge for the Minister.

We can look at this negatively, but we can also look at it in perhaps a more positive light. There are ways in which the money can be found. Some of those ways were spelled out today. Look at the beneficiaries: there are creative ways in which those who benefit from the students coming out of universities could make some financial contribution towards the £40 million deficit. We can also look at other things. It is not always suitable and it is not sustainable that, every time there is a funding crisis, the burden is placed on the students. That is totally unacceptable. It is not sustainable, and it is not the way forward. If the Minister brings the matter to the Executive and puts his case for the funding, I believe that some way around it can be found. It always is. The old saying is that where there's a will, there's a way. There is no doubt that, around the House this evening, there is a will for that £40 million funding gap to be plugged. When we have that collective will in the House, there is a way forward.

Of course, the whingers were in the Chamber again today, complaining about the DUP and Sinn Féin going through the Lobbies in support of the Budget. It appears that we have people in the Chamber who do not want a Budget and do not want the Assembly to move forward. I hear the SDLP Members, especially, talking about student fees and how they are so much against them. Yet they have such a short memory:

was it not the SDLP that introduced student fees on day one? I know that we have had this debate in the Chamber before, but it was rather hypocritical of SDLP Members to say what they did, given that the SDLP introduced student fees at the start. Nevertheless, that is what we have to deal with when we are dealing with issues such as this.

I like people who are prepared to stand up and make the hard decisions, and there are hard decisions to be made. When it comes to making those decisions, my party will not shy away from them. We will make them. I trust that all the other Ministers will do exactly the same thing and will not run away from the Executive but be there to make the hard decisions when the time comes.

I will deal with some of the issues that Members raised, because I know that time is moving fairly quickly. The Chairman mentioned the budget. He spelled out the £28 million in efficiencies that are required of the universities and the £40 million shortfall. He spoke of the ramifications for students and businesses if that gap is not plugged. We can all agree with that. He also said that the higher education sector is not an ivory tower but an economic force in Northern Ireland. There is no getting away from that. Our higher education sector is an economic force and, as has been mentioned by a number of Members, an economic driver in Northern Ireland.

Alastair Ross spoke of foreign inward investment and how those businesses will consider the quality of our graduates and the level of our skills. He talked of the importance of maintaining the reputation of our universities and attracting overseas students and the income that that brings in. He said that we do not need to raise the cap on student fees but that the Executive have a collective duty and responsibility to look at the funding gap and see whether there is some way around it.

Barry McElduff highlighted Sinn Féin's position on fees, saying that education should relate to ability to learn rather than ability to pay. He talked about the psychological deterrent experienced by students from low-income backgrounds when a fee is placed on them going to university.

I am going through the contributions quickly. Pat Ramsey said that the work carried out to widen access will be lost without adequate funding.

He is concerned about that and about the increased demand from young people to get into local universities because of the higher fees in England. How can we meet that need? Pat Ramsey went on to say that there is no appetite for the increase in tuition fees. That has been well enough highlighted around the Chamber this evening.

Chris Lyttle spoke of the need to promote a highly skilled workforce that will act as a catalyst for the education system, to have increased co-operation and to work with further education colleges to see what efficiency savings can be made. That needs to be looked at.

David McIlveen spelt out the party's position. He said that there would be no increase in fees outside inflation and that raising tuition fees would not be a constructive way forward. He also highlighted different areas where we can look at matters and get other funding streams brought in to help to plug the gap. He highlighted the fact that many Northern Ireland students have left Northern Ireland not to return. We must do something to stop the brain drain and keep our students in Northern Ireland.

Many other issues were raised that we do not have time to go into this evening as the debate draws to a close. However, the Committee calls on the Minister to take account of the concerns raised by Members today and to reflect those concerns in the final drafting of the policy for higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland. That is a challenge to you, Minister, as you go to the Executive and place your case before them. Do not leave the Executive until you get an answer on the way to plug this gap.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that funding is available to maintain the excellence of Northern Ireland's higher education system and is consistent with our aim of maximising educational opportunities for all.

Adjourned at 6.28 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 28 June 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I put in a question to the Minister of the Environment on 27 May which was due for answer on 7 June. To date, I have not received a response. I understand that it is a new term and that people are busy. However, I think that that is an inordinate amount of time for me to wait to receive an answer.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for her point of order. Let me take it up with the Minister and the Department, and I will come back to the Member directly.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Summit Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that the First Minister wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the sixteenth summit meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which was held in Lancaster House, London, on 20 June. All Northern Ireland Ministers who attended the summit have agreed that I should make this statement to the Assembly on their behalf.

The United Kingdom Government hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Nick Clegg. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny. The Scottish Government were led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Alex Salmond. The Welsh Government were led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones. The Government of Jersey were represented by the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Treasury and Resources, Senator Philip Ozouf. The Government of Guernsey were led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Lyndon Trott. The Isle of Man Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Tony Brown.

In addition to the deputy First Minister and me, the Northern Ireland delegation consisted of the Minister of the Environment; the Minister for Employment and Learning; the Minister of Justice; the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; the Minister for Regional Development; the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure; and the OFMDFM junior Ministers.

A full list of participants is attached to the copies of the statement that have been provided to Members.

The London summit again underlined the British-Irish Council's unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its member Administrations through positive, practical relationships, and in providing a forum for consultation and co-operation on east-west issues. The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon David Cameron MP, addressed delegates at the commencement of the conference and, in particular, drew attention to the need for member Administrations to work closely together. Member Administrations continue to consult, discuss and exchange information with one another on a wide range of matters of mutual interest.

The summit afforded Administrations an opportunity to provide an update on their respective economic situations and a substantive discussion on their shared objective of promoting growth and its related challenges and opportunities. The Council discussed how best to achieve strong, sustainable and balanced growth that could be more evenly shared across member Administrations. It considered measures to promote economic growth, including incentives to start, finance and grow businesses; the encouragement of investment and exports as a route to a more balanced economy; and the creation of a more educated, skilled and flexible workforce. The Council agreed that member Administrations should continue to learn from one another's successes and identify synergies between them.

For our part, we highlighted our particular challenges. While welcoming the encouraging signs of growth and our success in attracting investment at a time of deep recession, we emphasised that continuing effort and improved approaches will be needed to grow the economy back to full health and to rebalance it over the longer term. This may, as the Assembly is aware, include a change to the rate of corporation tax. We highlighted again, as we did at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) plenary meeting on 10 June, the difficulties that Northern Ireland faces through the exposure of its banking sector to developments in the Republic of Ireland. There was also a shared concern among the Administrations about the continuing constraints on the availability of finance for homeowners and businesses.

The Council considered and welcomed a discussion paper on an all-islands approach (AIA) to energy resources which was tabled by the United Kingdom Government. It agreed the vision for an approach to energy resources across the British Isles that would enable opportunities for commercial generation and transmission; facilitate the cost-effective exploitation of renewable energy resources; increase the integration of markets; and improve security of supply. The Council agreed principles to underpin that vision and launched a programme of joint work spanning the potential for renewable energy trading, as well as work streams on interconnection and market integration.

The Council discussed the progress of the work to establish a standing secretariat for the British-Irish Council. The Council will receive a further progress report on that at the next summit meeting in Dublin later this year; however, it agreed a target start date for the operation of the secretariat of 1 January 2012, subject to all details and outstanding issues being finalised. This Administration is fully involved in the work necessary to establish the secretariat.

The Council also noted the progress described in update reports provided to it on each of the 11 work sectors of the BIC.

We took the opportunity, under "any other business", to register our continuing concern with the other Administrations about the United Kingdom Government's proposals for Her Majesty's Coastguard and its potential implications for Northern Ireland.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Council agreed that the next BIC summit will be hosted by the Republic of Ireland in the autumn.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the First Minister for his summary of the BIC summit meeting, much of which comes back to financial issues. I note that there was a discussion about the financial aspects of all the member Administrations and that they all provided an update on their respective economic positions. Given that a significant financial contribution was made to the Government of the Republic of Ireland by the European Union and a separate contribution was made to them by the UK Government, what is the up-to-date financial position of the Irish Government and of the Irish state?

Mr P Robinson: The Government of the Republic of Ireland gave a detailed exposition of their position and indicated that they felt that a number of the fiscal issues that had caused concern were now under control.

Of course, they emphasised the fact that they had not asked for the bailout but that it had been provided. Those of us who have looked at Northern Ireland's position have recognised that the assistance that has been given by the European Union and, indeed, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as that which has been given by Her Majesty's Government, has presented us with a conundrum. To some extent, corporation tax levels in the South have been held down because of a subvention by the United Kingdom Treasury. Therefore, we have placed the onus on the Treasury to rectify the imbalance that we now have with our neighbour in order to ensure that we are able to reduce Northern Ireland's corporation tax levels as well.

Mrs Hale: How does the BIC's work complement other east-west relationships?

Mr P Robinson: It is worth pointing out that the number of meetings of the British-Irish Council, in plenary and other forms, has substantially increased during the past four years. Work has also been carried out by the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC), which does not involve the Isle of Man, Guernsey, Jersey, or, indeed, the Republic of Ireland. We also have North/South relationships. Therefore, a range of interconnecting networks assists us in seeing how things are done best elsewhere and, indeed, in learning from mistakes that have occurred elsewhere. It is a growing east-west relationship, with which, I believe, everybody in the House feels comfortable, just as the North/South relationship has increasingly been one that has improved relations with the Republic of Ireland to an all-time high.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat as an ráiteas. Tá ceist agam don Aire, agus is í an cheist seo í.

Given high energy costs and the importance of developing renewable energy, can the First Minister provide more information on the all-island approach to energy development?

Mr P Robinson: Of course, what the BIC discussed was not an all-island approach but an all-islands approach — an approach throughout the British Isles. We recognise that we have a link with

the Irish Republic, which I hope works well for both jurisdictions. We also have a mainland connection. As regards the all-islands approach, we are looking in particular at what renewables can do to augment the conventional energy supply that we already have on the grid. Northern Ireland is well placed with regard to its contribution towards EU targets. We hope that, with the above-average level of wind around the island, we might be able to make a continuing contribution towards renewables, not only through wind energy, but through wave and tidal energy.

Ms Ritchie: Bearing in mind the scarcity of indigenous energy resources, can the First Minister confirm that the energy work stream covers the vital area of security of energy supply? With regard to the economy, can he also confirm what discussions have taken place about the need to reduce VAT on tourism services from 20% to a rate comparable to the 9% rate that will exist in the South from 1 July?

Mr P Robinson: We already have the North/South grid link. We have the link with Scotland. Therefore, not only do we have an indigenous supply, which relies largely on coal and gas, we could, clearly, increase that supply with renewables.

We have an excellent opportunity through the all-island approach to exploit our resources commercially. There is also a spin-off: Belfast Harbour Commissioners' proposal to bring DONG Energy into the harbour estate. The more we exploit the wind farms in the North Sea and elsewhere, the more it will help jobs in Northern Ireland.

As for VAT, the honourable lady is in a better position to raise that matter in the House of Commons, as it is clearly a matter for the United Kingdom Government.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the First Minister for his statement. He said that there was "a substantive discussion" on economic growth and, specifically, that:

"the creation of a more educated, skilled and flexible workforce"

was identified. Given that the First Minister said that the higher education and student finance budget should receive a light touch, did he take the opportunity to discuss regional variations among the member Administrations

in the funding of higher education and student finance?

Mr P Robinson: Students will be more content with the policies of this Administration on student fees than with those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Member's colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning is bringing proposals to the Executive on how we deal with those issues and their impact on universities. The Member's colleague spoke during the BIC on higher education and skills, and he reflected the views of the Executive as a whole.

10.45 am

Mr I McCrea: I thank the First Minister for his statement, one of the headings of which is "The Economy". Will the First Minister outline what discussions took place and give us some detail on them? This Administration faces problems similar to those of other Administrations.

Many Ministers from Northern Ireland attended the BIC. Will the First Minister look at that to ensure that, in comparison to other Administrations, Northern Ireland reduces the number of Ministers who attend?

Mr P Robinson: The same economic problems face every part of the British Isles to a greater or lesser extent; we all know the difficulties that there have been in the Republic of Ireland. With the possible exception of some of the smaller islands that have special and peculiar circumstances, everyone has had considerable difficulty with the reduction in public expenditure and pressure from a reduced job market. Those issues are common throughout.

Northern Ireland will be slower to come out of recession, as has always been the case in economic downturns. All the analysis of the economy indicates that unless there is— I hate using the word "game-changer" — a factor that gives us a new fiscal instrument that stimulates the economy, we will have a very slow rate of growth and a long time before we narrow the gap between levels of gross value added (GVA) in Northern Ireland and those elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

In relation to the number of Ministers, I would have expected the Member to rejoice that there is a desire in all parts of this House to be part of the east-west relationship to such an enthusiastic extent that we were the largest delegation. A question about the number of

Northern Ireland Ministers was asked at the press conference afterwards. Although there is a wide-ranging agenda and Ministers want to contribute on their subject, there is perhaps a need for us to look at how we might curtail the numbers attending. At the same time, we have to recognise that, unlike any other Administration in the BIC, we have a mandatory coalition Government and, therefore, we have five parties, all of which wish to know what is going on at those levels.

So, we have peculiar circumstances, but I am sure that, as we normalise our processes here, we will be able to reduce our numbers.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the First Minister for his statement. I will ask two questions, the first about corporation tax. Was an understanding of the other regions' approach to corporation tax gained in the discussion? What were their general opinions of it? Secondly, is there a plan for planning authorities so that they can deal with applications for energy resources and make sure that they are used properly? Is there a plan to make the likes of wind energy more acceptable to the community at large?

Mr P Robinson: The Member and I will both be glad that the Speaker was distracted when he said that he would ask two questions. I think that it is clear that other parts of the United Kingdom feel that they, too, should benefit from the ability to vary the level of corporation tax.

The deputy First Minister and I have been very forthright in indicating that we have unique circumstances in Northern Ireland. We share a land border with a state that has a much more attractive level of corporation tax for foreign direct investment and, indeed, a level that helps its indigenous growth. Also, we have come out of a very long period of division and conflict. Our infrastructure has not received the level of attention and investment that it should have. Therefore, we have a historic legacy that requires us to have something that gives our economy a boost. We also face a number of difficulties because we are on the periphery of Europe. So, we have argued that our uniqueness means that Northern Ireland has a special case.

I believe that the consultation paper produced by Her Majesty's Government indicates that they, too, recognise that Northern Ireland has quite different circumstances to those that prevail elsewhere. We hope that that will lead to the

Government's allowing us to have the power to vary corporate tax.

On the question of energy, one purpose of the AIA is to look at a range of issues, including regulation, planning, research and development, and any environmental gaps that there may be. It will also consider how we might be able to better commercialise and exploit the resources. So, planning is clearly required, although when the Member was asking the question, I got the sense that he was referring more to on-land wind farms than those offshore. I will resist making a personal comment about what I think of on-land wind farms; suffice it to say that I would rather have them offshore.

Mr Dunne: I understand that the issue of the closing of Her Majesty's Coastguard station at Bangor was raised at the summit. Will the First Minister indicate the nature of those discussions?

Mr P Robinson: Colleagues charged the deputy First Minister and me with raising that issue at the summit, and that was duly done. It was, of course, outside the remit of the BIC, but that has never stopped us in the past. The Government acknowledged the concerns that we expressed. We had both been down to Bangor to see the work that is being done. We recognise that this is not just a financial matter, nor should it be considered as one; we are talking about people's lives and the very clear need for us to have a service that is close to hand and that can provide us with the best possible safety, not just around the coastal areas but on the loughs. That point has been well made to the Government.

I note that one of the Liverpool MPs indicated yesterday that they had had a very good meeting with the Minister on the issue. I hope that the Minister is moving away from the either/or attitude, which describes the choice as either Belfast or Liverpool. The Government should be looking again at their overall proposal for coastguard services for the whole of the United Kingdom. This is something that you cannot play about with for just financial reasons.

Mrs Overend: I thank the First Minister for his statement. I note the discussions on the electricity grid infrastructure. Will the Minister detail any discussions there may have been regarding the recent takeover of NIE by the Irish Government-owned ESB?

Mr P Robinson: There was no discussion on that matter. The leader of the Member's party and I have jointly written on this issue, expressing some concerns. There clearly are many advantages in respect of the availability of the market and what the commercial market can do. We have expressed some concerns, but, wearing my First Minister's hat, I cannot comment on them.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. The Minister referred to the discussion on the continuing constraints on the availability of finance for homeowners and businesses. Was any update given on the legislation going through Westminster on credit unions that will bring forward alternative sources of revenue and finance for people?

Mr P Robinson: No, there was no discussion on that issue. The Member has made her point, and it is a matter that my colleagues can take up. Credit unions have played a significant role in Northern Ireland, and the deputy First Minister and I have been working with them as part of the team that was brought in to look at a joined-up approach to dealing with the downturn in our economy.

They have asked for certain things to be done. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responding to those issues, and I hope that that will make that area of activity a lot easier. As it gets more and more difficult to get loans from the banks, it is all the more important that we give every assistance we can to credit unions.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Given the multi-billions of pounds of public money for bailouts for the banks, and the pivotal role that they have in the growth of the economy, was the matter of banks raised at the meeting? It is crucial to any re-growth there may be, especially for first-time homebuyers but also for the recovery of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are heavily dependent on banks in supporting them through this and helping them into the new growth that hopefully will come.

Mr P Robinson: I think the Member is right. I do not think we have had over the past number of months a meeting of the BIC, the JMC or the North/South Ministerial Council when we did not discuss the role of the banks. The deputy First Minister and I also met the Chancellor

and raised again the issue of our reliance on our main four banks, two of which are based in Dublin and clearly have difficult issues to face.

One of our other banks is a subsidiary of a bank that is now effectively under Government ownership in the United Kingdom, and the other, Danske Bank, is outside Northern Ireland as well. We asked at the JMC meeting that the Chancellor second one of his officials to look at the peculiar banking circumstances of Northern Ireland. I think I am right in saying that he agreed that he would do that.

Mr G Robinson: Now that the dates have been agreed for the British-Irish Council standing secretariat, what further action will follow to get the secretariat up and running, and will Northern Ireland contribute to it?

Mr P Robinson: Yes, of course Northern Ireland will contribute to it because the push to have a standing secretariat came from Northern Ireland. The target date of 1 January 2012 has been set.

At the previous BIC summit, we agreed that Scotland would be the home of that secretariat. The Scottish Executive have indicated that they will cover the set-up costs. Our contribution will be about £15,000 a year, so we are getting pretty good value. Staff will be co-located at the facility, which we expect to be in Edinburgh, but that issue has to be resolved between now and 1 January. The Scottish Government have to determine and provide us with details of the accommodation that will be available. We will then have to look at staffing issues, procedures and other issues that relate to it, so there is quite a lot of work to do between now and 1 January.

11.00 am

Mr Allister: Given the telling contrast between the speed and lavish nature of the secretariat that was established for the North/South bodies and the feet dragging over the secretariat for the east-west dimension of the Belfast Agreement, and now the revelation that we will contribute £15,000 to that secretariat even though we contribute over £1 million per annum to the North/South Ministerial Council, does the First Minister, who is now such an enthusiastic operator of the Belfast Agreement, have any explanation as to why the east-west link is so patently the poor relation? Why has it taken the four years that he has been in office to get even to the point of a start date for a secretariat for the east-west dimension?

Mr P Robinson: I suppose that that is as close as we will get to congratulations from the Member for succeeding where others have failed in getting to the stage at which we have a start date. Some day, the Member will shock us all and silence the House by coming out with one word that is positive or constructive to the Assembly, but we might have to wait some time for that.

Maybe he has not worked it out, but I will give him the pure maths for his own sake, and he can work it out in his own time. If two countries are sharing the cost of a secretariat, their contributions will be larger than they would be to a secretariat in which a whole range of countries, including the United Kingdom Government, incurred the cost. I would have thought that that is fairly basic maths, but clearly it is beyond the Member. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Assembly Business

Principal Deputy Speaker

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the nomination of a Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. The process will be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5A. I will begin by asking for a nomination. Any Member may rise to nominate one of the Deputy Speakers to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. Only a name should be proposed at that point, as I will return to the proposer to speak first in the debate. When I have confirmed that the person nominated is willing to act as Principal Deputy Speaker, a debate relevant to the nomination will take place.

The Business Committee has agreed that only one Member will speak on behalf of each party in the debate. At the end of the debate, I will put the Question on the nomination. The vote will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I will ask for a further nomination, and the process will be repeated until a nomination is approved by cross-community consent.

If that is clear, do I have a proposal for a Deputy Speaker to be nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker?

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I propose Francie Molloy.

Mr Allister: Shame.

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Molloy, do you agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker?

Mr Molloy: I do.

Mr Speaker: Standing Orders provide for a debate to take place on the nomination. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. I also advise Members that Standing Order 5(7) requires the debate to be relevant to the nomination. I will not allow Members to stray into any other area.

Members will have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Ms J McCann: It gives me great pleasure to nominate Francie Molloy. Francie has been a councillor for 26 years, held the position of mayor for two terms and was president of NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government

Association). In his six years with NILGA, he held a number of positions, and has proved his ability to be independent. In 2007, he was nominated as Deputy Speaker and elected from the Floor of the Assembly. Over the past four years in that role, he has carried out his duties in an impartial manner and ensured that Members from all parties were respected and had their say. With that, I wish to nominate Francie Molloy as Principal Deputy Speaker. I am very pleased to do so.

Mr Elliott: It is interesting to hear Ms McCann speak of Mr Molloy in such a way. I do not think that she and her party always had that opinion of Mr Molloy. It was only a few years ago that he was suspended from that party for some of his actions.

The Ulster Unionist Party has clearly opposed the position of Principal Deputy Speaker, or deputy principal speaker, whichever way round it is. I am surprised at Sinn Féin, and, in particular, Mr Molloy, taking up such a post as a job for the boys in the Assembly. They seem to have bought into this entire process. We will be opposing the nomination.

Mr Speaker, I know that you are aware of Mr Molloy's conduct last week in the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, at which he totally disregarded the ruling of the Chair. That is why I believe that Mr Molloy is unfit to hold the position of Principal Deputy Speaker. Therefore, I look forward to witnessing how he will carry out the role, because I am sure that it will go through on a cross-community vote, thanks to the two main parties supporting each other. I will wait, and judge his performance in days to come. Mr Speaker, in holding your office, you would not allow people to stray off the mark and away from what is being discussed in such a way as Mr Molloy has shown that he is capable of in Committee. Therefore, we oppose this.

Mr Lyttle: My party has endeavoured to be co-operative throughout this proposal. However, in the final analysis at the last stage, we saw no demonstrable need for the change in title and voted against the proposal. It is for that reason that we will be voting against the nomination.

Mr Allister: Some of the first business of this Assembly when it came back after the election was the first stage of the sordid deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin, which, today, reaches its climax. On this, the last day of this sitting, we

will see elevated to the totally unnecessary and pointless position of Principal Deputy Speaker Mr Francie Molloy.

We heard something of his CV from the proposer. We certainly did not hear it all. Other places have heard much more about the CV of Mr Molloy. Those on the DUP Benches, when they go to elections, pretend — yes, pretend — that they are returning to Stormont to resist the Sinn Féin agenda. I have been here only a few weeks, but, every day, I see, hand in glove, the co-operation between the DUP and Sinn Féin. When those Members troop through the Lobby to my right to vote for Mr Molloy, as they inevitably will as the Lobby fodder that they are for DUP/Sinn Féin rule, may the words of their colleague Mr David Simpson ring in their ears.

I remind them what he said of Mr Molloy in the House of Commons when he implicated him in the murder of Eric Lutton. Yet today, people like David Simpson's colleague Stephen Moutray, who once said that he would go back to his shop before he would support Sinn Féin in government, will troop through that Lobby to elevate the very man who David Simpson told him all about.

Rev William McCrea addressed the House of Commons and told it that Francie Molloy should be arrested for war crimes against the people of the UK. May that salutary lesson ring in the ears of those who today troop through, and prick whatever conscience remains, as they do the bidding and show obeisance by taking whatever action it takes to keep Sinn Féin happy in this House.

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

Mr Allister: So, I say to each one of them: shame on you for the action you are about to take.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Question put, That the nomination of Deputy Speaker Molloy to act as Principal Deputy Speaker be approved.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 50; Noes 33.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr Lynch,

Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

UNIONIST:

Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Irwin, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr W Clarke and Ms Ruane.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

OTHER:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mr Swann.

Total votes	83	Total Ayes	50	[60.2%]
Nationalist Votes	37	Nationalist Ayes	23	[62.2%]
Unionist Votes	39	Unionist Ayes	27	[69.2%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Agnew.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the nomination of Deputy Speaker Molloy to act as Principal Deputy Speaker be approved.

Mr Speaker: I offer my congratulations to Principal Deputy Speaker Molloy and look forward to working with him. I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next piece of business.

Executive Committee Business

Welfare Reform Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

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

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clauses 122 and 123 of the Welfare Reform Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with the transfer of tax credit functions and the supply of information by a Northern Ireland Department, or by a person providing services to a Northern Ireland Department, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Welfare Reform Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 16 February 2011; it contains provision for the introduction in Great Britain of an integrated working-age benefit to be called universal credit. It will be paid to people in and out of work and will replace a range of means-tested benefits and tax credits such as income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, working tax credit and child tax credit. It will provide support for people between 18 and the age at which the claimant becomes eligible for state pension credit. The Bill also contains provision for the introduction of personal independence payment to replace disability living allowance, changes to housing benefit, employment and support allowance and to the forthcoming child maintenance scheme. The proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill that I have just outlined apply only to Great Britain at this stage. I am considering the position in relation to Northern Ireland and will bring forward proposals to the Assembly in due course.

The areas of the Westminster Bill that apply to Northern Ireland and which require this legislative consent motion deal with the transfer of tax credit functions and the supply of information by a Northern Ireland Department. The motion asks the Assembly to agree that those consequential provisions may be considered by the UK Parliament since they could change the functions of three Northern Ireland Departments and the legislative competence of the Assembly.

By way of background, I should explain that the intention is that there will be no new claims for

tax credits after the introduction of universal credit, which is planned for October 2013, after which existing tax credit claimants will be transferred to universal credit through a managed transition process. It is expected that, by October 2017, there will be no remaining tax credit awards. To enable the Department for Work and Pensions to manage the transition process, it may be desirable to transfer tax credit functions from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to that Department.

The Welfare Reform Bill contains an order-making power to allow for the transfer of tax credit functions from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to the Department for Work and Pensions. It also contains an order-making power to allow for new functions to be given or functions to be removed from HM Treasury, HM Revenue and Customs and a Northern Ireland Department.

The power to allocate or remove functions is purely consequential on the transfer of tax credit functions to the Department for Work and Pensions. It is intended that tax credits will remain an excepted matter and that the Department for Work and Pensions will administer tax credits for Northern Ireland until the last tax credit claimants have been migrated to universal credit. That will involve new arrangements for investigating tax credits cases in Northern Ireland, as the Department for Work and Pensions does not have a presence here. It is proposed that the Department for Work and Pensions might seek to enter into an agency agreement with my Department — in practice, the Social Security Agency — to appoint authorised officers who would then be able to carry out the relevant investigations.

11.30 am

Following a transfer of functions, the Department for Work and Pensions will need to be able to access certain HMRC data and to provide to other Departments data relating to tax credits. The Bill includes provision for a wider single two-way data-sharing gateway between the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs and relevant Northern Ireland Departments, so that information can be shared to facilitate the discharge of their respective functions. That provision is not without precedent. It builds on existing gateways that already extend to Northern Ireland to enable information to be shared and reused

for the exercise of functions in relation to social security, child support, war pensions and employment and training.

I expect that Members will have reservations about the wide-ranging proposals in the Westminster Welfare Reform Bill, but I emphasise that they relate to Great Britain, are not a matter that the Assembly has any power over and do not have any bearing on the motion. The legislative consent motion deals with the much narrower technical issues of the consequential changes to the functions of the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) as a result of the proposals dealing with the transfer of tax credit functions and the supply of information relating to Northern Ireland Departments contained in the Westminster Bill. On that basis, I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, I support the motion. At its meeting of 16 June 2011, the Committee agreed a short report on the legislative consent motion. That report concluded that the Committee will support the motion as it applies solely to clauses 122 and 123 of the Westminster Welfare Reform Bill. The report was e-mailed to every Member, and copies of my letter drawing attention to the report on the Committee's web page were provided to all MLAs.

As the Minister explained, the provisions relate simply to the transfer of tax credit functions and the sharing of information by Departments here, the Department for Work and Pensions, Revenue and Customs and the Treasury. DSD officials described the provisions as largely minor and technical in nature. As the sharing of information includes the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Committee also wrote to the Committee for Finance and Personnel and received confirmation that DFP is content with the provisions of the legislative consent motion that relate to it.

Although the Committee for Social Development supports the specific provisions that the motion refers to, the Committee's report notes that the Westminster Welfare Reform Bill contains numerous other provisions, such as the introduction of universal credit and changes

to industrial injuries benefit, housing benefit, pensions credit, disability living allowance (DLA) and so on. The Minister referred to that a moment ago. No doubt, those provisions will come before the Assembly in a welfare reform Bill later this year or in the early part of next year. That will be a completely different matter for many of us and will merit much more detailed scrutiny of its impact on the poorest people here.

In my role as a party representative, it is important to say that we have been advised by the Department that, over the next number of years, the consequence of what has been described as the British Government's Welfare Reform Bill will be that somewhere in the region of £450 million to £500 million will be taken out of the local economy. I believe that various Committee members share that concern. We believe that those will be stealth cuts masquerading as welfare reform. That will require much more scrutiny because, undoubtedly, many of the cuts that will result from that legislation will have a serious, negative impact on many of the most vulnerable people, while taking a considerable amount of money from the local economy. That will add to the £4 billion of cuts that the British Government have already taken from the block grant.

Mr Copeland: I speak as a member of the Social Development Committee. I am content that the matters have been discussed in Committee, and the representations that we have had have been useful and formative.

To any of us who have been involved in trying to assist constituents through the morass that is the benefits and welfare system, it is patently obvious that it is burdensome, cumbersome and difficult to operate as it is. No matter what legislation appears at the far end, there are, for us — for me — three principles that need to be reflected if not enshrined: simplicity in the legislation itself; compassion in the way in which it is interpreted; and respect in the way in which it is implemented. A benefits system that makes it more difficult for people to conduct their life in work rather than out of it cannot in any circumstances be considered compassionate, and, as has been said elsewhere, this legislation is fundamental to the day-to-day life of many of our citizens.

Mr Durkan: We also support the motion. These are two pretty innocuous clauses in an otherwise

draconian Welfare Reform Bill. Although we support the acceptance of those clauses, we do so without prejudice to our party's position on the Welfare Reform Bill, many elements of which we oppose due to the negative impact that they will have on the most vulnerable people in our society.

Mr McCausland: I thank Members for their contributions. As has been said, we will return to the issue of welfare reform in the autumn. However, the matter before us today is minor and technical in nature, as the Chair of the Committee observed, and relates to just two clauses in the Welfare Reform Bill. So, I thank Members for their contributions and commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clauses 122 and 123 of the Welfare Reform Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with the transfer of tax credit functions and the supply of information by a Northern Ireland Department, or by a person providing services to a Northern Ireland Department, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Committee Business

Assembly Members' Pension Scheme

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed that the motion will be treated as a business motion. As Members know, there will be no debate on the issue.

Mr P Ramsey: I beg to move

That the following Members are appointed as the trustees of the Assembly Members' pension scheme: Mr John Dallat, Mr Ross Hussey, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Mickey Brady and Mr Jim Wells.

Five Members of the Assembly are required to act as pension trustees as set out in the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2008. The present trustees were appointed by resolution of the Assembly in May 2007. Following the recent election, I beg to move the motion with the inclusion of the five new Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the following Members are appointed as the trustees of the Assembly Members' pension scheme: Mr John Dallat, Mr Ross Hussey, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Mickey Brady and Mr Jim Wells.

Corporation Tax

Mr Speaker: This item is a joint motion from the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That this Assembly supports, in principle, the case for the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and looks forward to the outcome of the HM Treasury consultation on 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy', the provision of further information on the associated costs and benefits, and the development of more detailed proposals for implementing and exercising the powers.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In its emergency Budget in 2010, the British Government signalled that they intended to examine mechanisms for rebalancing the economy here, including, among other things, the possibility of allowing a more competitive corporation tax rate. The resultant consultation was launched by the Treasury in March 2011 and was extended to 1 July. The initial closing date of 24 June did not afford enough time to bring forward a co-ordinated response on behalf of the Assembly. The joint motion has, therefore, been tabled by the Finance and Personnel and the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committees to help to inform any response that they or any other Committees or individual Members may wish to make to the Treasury consultation. Moreover, by agreeing the motion, which proposes cautious support for pursuing the devolution of corporation tax powers, the Assembly will send a collective message to the Treasury at this important point in the ongoing negotiations over the possible terms on which such powers could be exercised.

Members will be aware of the fundamental weaknesses in the local economy, which have been well documented and include, for example, greater reliance on the public sector, higher rates of economic inactivity, relatively low incomes, high rates of poverty and a legacy of capital underinvestment. Some of those issues were touched on in the Treasury consultation paper,

not least and significantly the lower productivity in terms of gross value added (GVA) per capita compared, with a few exceptions, with regions in Britain.

There is no question that a new approach must be taken to the economic challenges that face us. An economic strategy based simply on more of the same will not achieve the step change that is needed in the economy or go far enough in closing the productivity gap. In its recent report, the Westminster NI Affairs Committee noted that many of those who gave evidence to its inquiry considered:

"that previous policies had not had the desired effect and a significant reduction in corporation tax would be the dramatic change that business"

here needs.

The case for a more competitive rate of corporation tax and the impact that such a step would have on the local economy has been fairly extensively examined over recent years. As well as that recent NI Affairs Committee inquiry, investigations have been undertaken by, for example, the Economic Research Institute, the Economic Reform Group and, more recently, the Economic Advisory Group (EAG), which advises the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The evidence from those investigations points to the potential net gains from a more competitive corporation tax rate. The issue was also examined in previous Assembly mandates, including by the previous Finance and Personnel Committee, which tabled a joint motion, again with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, on the Economic Reform Group's report. The Assembly debated and unanimously supported that motion in May 2010.

There can be no doubt that attracting investment here will have a positive impact on the local economy. Among the key benefits of an attractive corporation tax rate that is cited in various reports is an increase in foreign direct investment (FDI). The Economic Advisory Group has highlighted that experience in the South as suggesting that low corporation tax is an important factor in attracting FDI. It also notes that corporation tax incentives in countries such as Estonia and Singapore are one of a number of policy measures that have attracted increased FDI and contributed to significant increases in output and employment.

In its report, the NI Affairs Committee noted that the rate of corporation tax is considered by many to have been a “game changer” in reviving the Southern economy. It also pointed to the Dublin Government’s clear belief that an attractive corporation tax rate remains an “important tool” in helping the South out of its present difficulties.

A Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) briefing paper issued to all Members in advance of the debate advises that the mid-point estimate for a gross FDI increase is £160 million in year 1, rising to £310 million by year 10. Domestic investment would increase by an estimated £110 million by year 10. The DFP paper also notes that a study undertaken by Oxford Economics on behalf of the Economic Advisory Group estimated that an average of 4,500 net additional jobs a year will be created in the longer term and that the measure would go some way towards creating a more private sector-oriented economy.

Although considerable effort has gone into examining and establishing the theoretical case for a competitive corporation tax rate, it must be recognised that a number of practical issues require more detailed exploration. In a paper commissioned by my Committee, the Assembly Research and Information Service set out a series of questions to which the Department responded in its own paper. Further clarification is needed in some areas, not least with regard to the implications for the block grant. Members will be aware by now of the Azores judgement, which is an EU ruling that requires that a region bear the cost of any reduction in tax revenue and states that it cannot be compensated by the member state authority.

There appears to be a lack of clarity or agreement on precisely how much corporation tax is collected locally. Therefore, it is difficult to predict what the cost may be. Most assumptions are in the region of £200 million to £300 million a year, although the Assembly Research and Information Service paper notes that DFP has suggested in the past that the figure may be in excess of £400 million by year 5. In its paper, DFP states that:

“The public expenditure implications of this are significant and it is vital that we know precisely how much corporation tax is collected”.

Perhaps the varying estimates arise from different calculation methods, but, nonetheless,

I call on DFP to press the issue with the Treasury as a matter of urgency.

11.45 am

In oral evidence to the Committee, Kate Barker, the chairperson of the Economic Advisory Group, reminded members that, at the same time as the public sector bears the cost, there will be immediate benefits to the private sector. Kate Barker also said:

“it is sometimes put as a gamble ... To be blunt, doing nothing is much more of a gamble.”

By that, she was cautioning that it would be a gamble to simply expect that the block grant will continue at the same rate as at present and that we would have:

“passed up ... an opportunity to change the game.”

It should also be noted that the Economic Advisory Group report considered that it would be important for the Executive to retain yield from other taxes that would be expected to increase, such as income tax and National Insurance contributions. The NI Affairs Committee called on the British Government to provide clarity on the issue. If that were possible, it could evidently help to mitigate some of the costs that are associated with the rate of reduction. That aspect should, therefore, form a critical part of the negotiations with the Treasury.

Concerns have also been raised that a reduction in corporation tax here would encourage brass plating, profit shifting or tax evasion and that relocation from Britain would result in a net loss to the Exchequer. I do not seek to minimise such concerns. However, the NI Affairs Committee stated that its evidence suggests that that risk:

“is sufficiently well mitigated against for it not to present a persuasive argument.”

DFP also stated that it expects measures to be put in place to minimise profit shifting.

Members will be very mindful that, by itself, a competitive rate of corporation tax would not be enough to rebalance the local economy. Rather, it is one strand in a strategy that should include, among other things, investment in research and development, innovation, education and skills. It should be accepted now, however, that a strong theoretical case exists for the devolution of corporation tax powers. It is clear that much more detailed work has to be done, and much will

depend on the outcome of ongoing negotiations with Treasury on how attractive the measure would be in practice.

The motion has been crafted to maximise support among Members. It is vital that the Assembly sends a strong message to the British Government, in particular that fair and reasonable working arrangements for devolving corporation tax powers need to be agreed with the Executive. The negotiations must have the central aim of rebalancing the local economy and must not result in terms that are skewed purely in the self-interest of Treasury.

For my own part, I feel that, as I said, the motion was crafted to ensure a broadly positive response from the Assembly, even in the context of ongoing negotiations. It is recognised that there are concerns, but they echo those that we had in the previous mandate with the devolution of policing and justice powers, when it was felt that the issue was too complex and sensitive for the Assembly. Quite clearly, we have demonstrated since then that the Assembly is well capable of handling those powers.

As has been suggested, this is not the silver bullet to address all our economic woes, but it begins to give us control of the fiscal levers that allow us to shape our own economic destiny, recognise our particular circumstances and not be subject to the whim of ideological changes brought about by a Tory-led Government in Britain. As is evident from the business community across the island, it would also allow us to begin to strengthen the all-Ireland links so that we could harmonise an all-Ireland approach to economic recovery. That has been accepted very publicly by business. Indeed, it has been accepted publicly and privately by many in the Chamber. It affords us the opportunity to begin to seize some measure of control over our economic destiny and to try to shape economic recovery, both in this region and on the island as a whole, and to decide our economic future.

On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr David McIlveen. The Member has five minutes.

Mr D McIlveen: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the subject, and I support the motion wholeheartedly.

Less than two weeks ago, I had the privilege of visiting Wrightbus in my North Antrim constituency. In the presence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and other representatives from the business community, we heard, one by one, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the Chamber of Commerce speak with one voice. It said that the Assembly should be given the powers to set its own rate of corporation tax, which, although not a cast-iron guarantee of success, is the best — perhaps the only — way that we can reinject some life into the Northern Ireland economy.

There have been many debates surrounding budgets and cuts to public spending in this short term of the Assembly. However, on this issue, talking must be coupled with listening. That means listening to the members of the private sector, on whom to a large extent, most of us agree, the success or failure of our economy relies.

Of course, the cynical among us will say that asking a business owner whether they want to pay less tax will not provoke an entirely surprising response, but we must remember that the majority of small businesses will not benefit directly from a reduction in corporation tax, if we choose to reduce it. However, even the small businesses support it, because they know that the secondary spend that comes from jobs created through foreign direct investment will benefit small retailers also.

If we reduce corporation tax, we must not be unmindful of the cost. We cannot be complacent about that. If public services suffer as a result of a reduction in corporation tax, we, as elected representatives, will have considerable explaining to do. However, the most conservative estimates of economic growth as a result of a reduction in corporation tax see our economy rising by something in the region of 6% a year. Given that the most optimistic forecasts see our current output at around 1.9%, the gains in revenue would comfortably mitigate any losses that we would incur through a reduction in the block grant.

There are huge challenges ahead for Northern Ireland in rebalancing our economy. However, with challenges come opportunities. The Celtic tiger economy in the Republic of Ireland was built predominantly on foreign direct investment from

the USA. Given the investment that we have put into the US markets, we should continue to work hard to attract further investment from that area. However, with emerging economies becoming ever stronger in India, China and other parts of the Far East, we are extremely well placed to attract investment from those areas if corporation tax powers are devolved to the Executive. In that regard, there is a huge strategic advantage to our being part of the UK, as it enables foreign businesses to set up a much-coveted base in Britain. If we can further incentivise those companies with a lower rate of tax than the other devolved regions, we will have an opportunity to move Northern Ireland forward to a new level of economic growth.

I conclude by paying tribute to Invest NI, which has exceeded pretty much every target that has been set before it in the past four years. In particular, I pay tribute to Alastair Hamilton, whose leadership, vision and passion for business in Northern Ireland has been and, I believe, will continue to be a major contributor to rebalancing Northern Ireland's economy.

Mr Cree: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, as the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland is such an important issue. I also welcome the fact that the two Committees, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Finance and Personnel, have brought the matter before the House today. The Committee for Finance and Personnel has looked at the issue and received representation from the Finance Minister. The positives for the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland are well documented. They are increased economic growth; the attraction of foreign direct investment; an increase in jobs, leading to lower unemployment; and the rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy, which is over-reliant on the public sector.

I want to focus on how a reduction in corporation tax would be implemented, should we have the power to alter the tax devolved to Northern Ireland. Any reduction in corporation tax should be done incrementally. That can be seen through the actions of the coalition Government, who announced major reforms to corporation tax with four 1% reductions to the main rate. The rate was reduced to 26% in April of this year and, by 2014, will be reduced to 23%. In Northern Ireland, we should look at a similar system, whereby we gradually reduce the rate of corporation tax with a view to competing on

a more equal playing field with the Republic of Ireland's rate of 12.5%.

There are a number of reasons why I believe that corporation tax should be lowered incrementally. First, due to the Azores ruling by the European Court of Justice, regional differences in direct taxation must satisfy fiscal autonomy. That means that Northern Ireland's block grant would have to be adjusted to reflect the cost of a reduction in corporation tax. In order to ensure that we do not inflict too severe a cut on the block in one go, an incremental lowering of the tax would mean that the reduction of the block grant would be spread over a longer time and would have the minimum impact possible on the provision of services to the people of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, incrementally lowering the rate of corporation tax would allow the Executive to respond flexibly to any change in the economy. The economic landscape is unclear in Northern Ireland, especially with a questionable four-year Budget that fails to protect front line health services and includes revenue-raising methods that lack sufficient clarity. I knew that the Minister would appreciate that comment. In those circumstances, it is vital that we have the ability to react to the particular challenges that the economy will present. Altering the rate of corporation tax on an incremental basis will allow us to do that.

Finally, it is essential that the devolution of corporation tax powers be used as one of a basket of measures to increase economic growth in Northern Ireland. The Treasury consultation sets out proposals such as research and development tax credits, an enhanced annual investment allowance, training credits and even a National Insurance holiday. All those measures need to be explored because only a combination of mechanisms will lead to a successful rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy.

Bearing in mind the points that I have raised, I support the motion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In my party's view, lowering the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland will be a major tool in helping to rebalance the economy here, which is over-reliant on a public sector that is all too often at the mercy of the political whims of whoever is in power at Westminster. The current tools that we have to develop the

private sector are useful and necessary but have not been successful in bringing about the growth that we require. We need to develop the private sector in order to generate more employment and spending and to deliver the revenue that we need to provide the best possible public services.

Foreign direct investment will be a major influence in rebalancing the economy, and a lower rate of corporation tax will be a major element in attracting it and closing the productivity gap. Indigenous businesses will also benefit from a lower corporation tax rate, and it will provide our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with additional capacity to invest to grow their businesses.

If the powers are devolved, we should not rush into reducing the rate without knowing the full fiscal implications of that decision. At present, we do not know how much corporation tax is taken in Northern Ireland. There are varying estimates from DFP and the Treasury, and we need an accurate baseline figure so that we can assess the true impact on the block grant and manage the shortfall. We know that corporation tax is volatile and that its take can vary greatly from year to year. To offset the costs associated with the devolution of corporation tax powers, it is important that Northern Ireland is in a position to avail itself of any indirect benefits that result from increased economic activity, such as receipts from increased income tax, VAT, National Insurance, excise duty and, indeed, corporation tax itself.

Although the devolution of corporation tax powers and the lowering of the rate here is not a magical mist that will cure all our economic ills, it is an essential tool in rebalancing the economy, making Northern Ireland a more attractive prospect for foreign direct investment and enhancing indigenous economic activity, which will result in a more prosperous Northern Ireland for all our people. We need the House to unite with enthusiasm behind the motion to ensure that we send a positive message on the issue. Those who negotiate on our behalf on this matter must put forward the strongest possible case for the devolution of corporation tax powers. It is an essential tool in advancing the prosperity of this region, and the SDLP fully supports the motion.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion as proposed, particularly as it specifies the words “in principle”

in stating that the Assembly supports the case for the devolution of corporation tax powers.

I feel that the next time we come to this matter, when we have the outcome of the Treasury consultation and all the cost-benefit information available to us, we will have a major decision to make. However, for today, I am happy to support the motion in principle, although I have some misgivings about the best way to proceed in the long term.

12.00 noon

If we have a lower corporation tax rate, what will the benefits be, and will it work? I heard the Committee Chair mention that 4,500 jobs would be created per annum over the next 10 years. That figure at least sounds realistic, unlike some of the figures that have been bandied about in the past year. The other day I heard that there would be 90,000 jobs. We would have to find more immigrants from somewhere to fill those jobs — it is just not possible. However, 4,500 sounds like a figure worth going for.

There is no doubt that the overwhelming weight of opinion in Northern Ireland advocates the measure. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group said:

“it is, without exaggeration, the only means we know of comprehensively changing the economic environment, within a timescale of years rather than decades.”

It is fair to say, however, that there are also well-informed voices, including some who would benefit from a reduction in the corporation tax rate, who take the opposite view. I wonder what the most important criteria are for an industrialist or an investor when deciding where to locate worldwide. I wonder where corporation tax ranks on the list of priorities. That list would include the availability of skilled labour; political stability; good infrastructure; closeness to markets; energy costs; wages levels; and the amount of government support available to establish incoming business. Some of those criteria we meet and some we would struggle with. However, I have heard it argued that no level of corporation tax would compensate for not ticking most of the boxes on that list.

The argument is forcefully made that, to compete for inward investment, we need a rate comparable with that of the Republic of Ireland. Compared with us, Ireland has certainly benefited from a level of inward jobs, but, again,

given the present circumstances, what will happen to the Irish corporation tax rate? The pressure is on from big hitters in the EU for Ireland to come more into line. It is a pressure that Ireland has so far resisted manfully, but is that position really sustainable? If the Irish have to go back to the EU for a further bailout, one condition will certainly be a rise in their corporation tax rate. The further argument is which line of investment to prioritise. Should it be this initiative, investment in our universities and education facilities — we had a good discussion about that yesterday — or support for small indigenous businesses? I imagine that the way forward is a cocktail of all three.

I can think of some people who started small in this country and went on to great things. I remember Allen McClay starting his business, Galen, in Portadown as a one-man band and where it led to. I think of Fred Wilson of FG Wilson, part of Caterpillar. Corporation tax was not a big factor for them when they started their businesses. Eddie Haughey of Norbrook is another example. As a young insurance man, I was famously asked to insure Norbrook when it first opened, but the company that I worked for decided that it did not like the look of it and that it would not go anywhere. *[Laughter.]* Mr Speaker, I can tell you that, if that company had made a different decision, I would not be here now, that is for sure.

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

We are right to support a full investigation of the costs and benefits of devolving corporation tax powers. The final decision regarding public expenditure will require the biggest leap of faith that we in the Assembly have ever had to make. We should not rush our fences on this matter; it is far too important, and there is no reason for haste. Other Members have said that we should take it as it comes. Let us make a balanced, well-informed decision at the end of the day. So, with the caveat that I expressed and those contained in the motion, I support the motion.

Mr Hamilton: I listened to the Member talk about a leap of faith, but I am not sure which side of the classic Alliance fence he wants to leap to. Having listened to his five-minute contribution, I am still not sure whether he is in favour of devolving powers.

Mr Lunn: Just to be clear: I said at the beginning and at the end of my speech that I support the motion.

Mr Hamilton: Very good. The Member's use of "in principle" was key, though.

I welcome the debate, not least its timing, which allows the House to offer its support, I hope, to the Treasury consultation, 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy'. It is a very timely debate to have to allow the Assembly to endorse in principle, or however we want to do it, the devolution of corporation tax powers.

In the general chorus of positivity on the motion, many Members have said that we would be naive in the extreme to think that devolving corporation tax powers would be an instant panacea to all our economic ills and that looking at corporation tax levels would be the only consideration that an investor would make before investing. Even with 0% business taxes and a low-cost regime across the board, foreign direct investment will not come to Northern Ireland unless we have the infrastructure, the skills and the telecommunications in place. Indeed, businesses will not come here unless we have golf courses, theatres and so on. There is a cocktail of measures that we must have. Companies such as Citigroup and the New York Stock Exchange have come to Northern Ireland, while Home Box Office (HBO) is making films and TV programmes here. Such things would never have been considered possible 10 years ago. Therefore, Northern Ireland already has huge attractions for investors. We have an almost unbeatable product, but the addition of a low rate of corporation tax would take that almost unbeatable product to a whole new level.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He outlines some of the very positive advantages, which I think are recognised across the House. Does he agree that the competitiveness that we could gain versus the cost is something that we will have to analyse? We need to concentrate on the rate — 15%, 10%, 12% or whatever it might be — and be sure that we are concentrating on its competitiveness. The one rate that has a political connotation, and about which people would have very strong reservations, is the 12.5% rate, because some people would use that as a harmonising tool rather than as a competitiveness tool.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Hamilton: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. The Member's point is an important one. If we get the powers to reduce the rate of corporation tax, we need to strike it at a rate that is right for Northern Ireland. There is a whole other discussion to be had on how we reach that figure, but the Member is absolutely right. We need to get the right rate for Northern Ireland to allow us to be competitive in what is an increasingly difficult global market.

Quite a few naysayers have said that we should not be discussing the issue at all. As Mr Lunn said, this may be, if not the biggest, one of the biggest policy decisions that we will ever face in Northern Ireland, and we should not face that decision lightly. We should be very careful and considered in our approach. Therefore, I welcome the naysayers' contribution to the debate, although I do not necessarily agree with what they say. However, we should be cognisant of the concerns raised.

In some ways, though, this is a simple decision to take. Whenever I look into the cupboard of possible policy interventions that would allow a step change to occur in our economy to right the imbalance between the public sector and the private sector here and that would close the gap in living standards — we sit at only 80% of the UK standard of living — the cupboard is pretty bare. In not going after a reduction in the rate of corporation tax, given the positive changes that its introduction might make to bringing investment and jobs to Northern Ireland, making indigenous companies beneficiaries in the process, we will be consigning Northern Ireland to more of the same — a sort of as-you-were economic future. That is not acceptable. We should not be looking at simply trundling along, with more of the same for ever and a day in Northern Ireland. We should be looking at something different and something better for our people.

The benefits are well known: jobs; foreign direct investment (FDI); and spin-offs for local companies. Although colleagues and I have laughed at and ridiculed the basket case that is the Irish economy in some respects over how the bubble down there has burst, I did note that 'The Irish Times' last week reported that the Central Statistics Office in Dublin has said that the export market in the South is now at a

record high. Irish exports in the first quarter of 2011 were up some 3.8% on the final quarter of 2010, and up 20.6% — valued at €1.5 billion — over the past year.

In spite of that bubble bursting, the Irish export market is doing well. That success is driven by the companies attracted by lower corporation tax. Why do the Irish jealously guard their power to have low corporation tax? We must consider the cost, but our approach must be that we want a lower rate. After that, we can discuss how. Mr Cree left out the issue of skills. If we reduce the rate, we need to have people available to take up the jobs in any number of years' time. There are a lot of things to be discussed but, in principle, we should respond very positively to the consultation. We should tell the Treasury that we want those powers and make our own decisions thereafter on the future.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the debate and the momentum for change that has built from a fairly lethargic beginning some five or six years ago. We have followed a trajectory that followed the all-party agreement during the Preparation for Government discussions and brought us to this point. The change of Administration at Westminster and the coalition Government taking a different approach from that of the previous Labour Administration have also contributed.

During every debate on the economy here, and we have debated it during much more benign circumstances than exist at present, everyone commented on, lamented or criticised the imbalance in the economy. It is a simple statement of fact: the economy is out of balance. Consequently, it is uncompetitive, underdeveloped and more vulnerable to the global and international economic trade winds. Up to now, the Assembly has experienced extreme difficulty, within its powers and resources, in responding appropriately to grow the economy, which was the number one priority established early in the previous mandate. The difficulty in addressing that was that the Assembly simply did not have the economic and fiscal tools in its toolbox.

I have heard comments on the dangers of harmonised tax regimes on the island of Ireland. That is a particular, sectional view. My opinion is that there are significant advantages in being able to market the island economy and

its harmonisation of rates as an economic opportunity for inward investment. The island could be marketed on the basis that it would be location indifferent because no fiscal advantage would apply on any part of the island. Up to now, the one-way street placed one part of the island at a significant disadvantage. However, a race to the bottom does not bode well for any economy, as we have seen over and over again.

I note that the Finance Minister has been careful to say continually to the Assembly that we must be responsible and careful. At times, he came across as negative, but he has done a service to the debate, because lowering corporation tax is not a risk-free option. No MLA will approach the decision not having been alerted to the possible downsides. A lower rate is not a silver bullet, and the decision requires a careful and, in my view, informed judgement. There has been considerable debate, study, research and consultation. Many exchanges have taken place, particularly between business, economic leaders, academia, trade unions and stakeholders. At the end of the day, all recognised the opportunities as well as the dangers.

I want to respond briefly to the warning about incremental change. That is a prudent and correct approach, and I do not argue against it. However, I do argue against — this is not a party political point — taking too conservative an approach. If we go for a lower rate of corporation tax but are afraid to be bold or imaginative, it could deny people the ability to produce early evidence that it is the correct strategy for growing and rebalancing the economy.

12.15 pm

Although we should continue to be vigilant of the steps that we take if the power is devolved, there is as much danger in being too cautious and careful as there is in overreaching. Were we given the additional powers, the collective wisdom in the Assembly and the experience and support of Ministers would ensure that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McLaughlin: — we could deliver on the number one objective of growing the economy.

Mr Girvan: I speak in favour of the motion, on the understanding that a reduction in the rate of corporation tax is only one of a number of

measures to try to rebalance Northern Ireland's economy, albeit that I believe that it is one of the greatest opportunities that we will have to attract inward investment. If used correctly, it could reduce the Northern Ireland economy's reliance on public sector employment. It would be a great revenue generator, not only through the taxes received but for the wider economy, particularly the retail end, which would benefit from the money generated.

A reduction in the rate would give Invest NI a great opportunity to go out and sell Northern Ireland on the world stage. Like my colleague Mr Campbell, I fear our going down the route of setting a target of 12.5%. We should not be aiming to be on a par with what is a small economy of five million in the Republic of Ireland, given that the United Kingdom has a population of more than 60 million.

Mr D Bradley: The Member warns the House about establishing a rate of 12.5%. Does he agree with the First Minister, who has espoused the view that a 10% rate might be appropriate?

Mr Girvan: Our manifesto states that our ultimate goal is 10.5%. I am happy enough to say that if that were to happen, we would be an even more attractive region in which to invest, I hope and pray. It is not just about inward investment; a number of local companies would take advantage of and benefit from that rate.

There is a fear that we would end up with a number of companies coming in and brass plating, as it is known. I appreciate that measures would have to be put in place to ensure that that did not happen. Look at what the Exchequer in London has done: it has already made changes to the way in which corporation tax is worked in that economy. There is a view to bring it down to 23%, and hopefully that will help there.

Northern Ireland is the gateway to Europe, and I appreciate that America is one of our key markets. The UK has a population of more than 60 million, and I think that we have to look at the strength of the British economy. We know about the fears of all those in the euro zone at present, and we need to take those fears into account. Northern Ireland has the opportunity to look not only to America for inward investment but to one of the world's leading economies, China. We have a wonderful workforce and a great skills base here. The universities gave a presentation in the Long Gallery yesterday that showed off some of the innovation and ability

that Northern Ireland as a region can sell on the world stage. We have to look at that, too.

Corporation tax is only one tool in the box, so we need to consider others, such as how to work with the Planning Service to encourage investment. One of the problems in the past was that businesses were put off because of the protracted experience that was planning process bureaucracy. There was some reform in that area and that is the sort of area that we need to encourage, to open up our economy to a large extent.

I appreciate that the consultation is under way. I have received many positive messages from local businesses, not only from small businesses but from some larger employers such as FG Wilson and other companies that are based in my constituency. It is vital that we encourage them and give them the confidence that we are using every tool in the box to grow our economy and to encourage the creation of jobs in Northern Ireland.

Mr Nesbitt: I also support the motion. We in the House are here to make the big decisions. Those decisions do not necessarily have a right answer, an exact formula or a scientific equation such as $E=mc^2$, and that is the case when it comes to something like corporation tax. The only wrong decision would be to do nothing. The world is moving on, and I know that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will tell the House that all the models and the predictions are based on a fundamental assumption of all other things being equal. I also know that he could tell us that in English and in the original Latin.

There is another Latin phrase that is appropriate; it translates into English as “buyer beware”. As we consider taking the power to set our own rate of corporation tax, there are uncertainties that must be resolved, such as whether Europe will support us or whether we will end up in the European Court of Justice. We must also consider whether we can agree with HM Treasury on the exact current tax take from corporation tax and its implications for the block grant, and whether we can agree with Treasury on what will happen to additional tax revenues and receipts from sources such as National Insurance contributions and VAT.

The world is moving on, not least with Europe ending selective financial assistance (SFA), which was the main tool used by Invest Northern Ireland and its predecessors to attract foreign

investment here. For me, corporation tax is not just a replacement for SFA; it will represent a transformational change. SFA traditionally tended to attract cost centres and operations that do not necessarily make a profit for their parent company, and which, therefore, do not find themselves liable to any form of tax, never mind corporation tax. Corporation tax is more likely to attract profit centres, such as those that deal in manufacturing and tradable services, and that will attract taxation.

For me, corporation tax is a starting-line tax. Without the power to set that tax, FDIs will look elsewhere to do business, but having it gives us the opportunity to get them to the starting line and encourage them to delve deeper into our offer. We have heard from other Members about that offer and the package, toolbox and elements that are needed, including improved planning and taxation law, the removal of red tape, and, above all else, the creation of the necessary skills base. Indeed, in a debate yesterday, we talked about the need for our further and higher education colleges to ensure that the ever-widening demand for highly skilled workers is met in the coming years.

I would like to remind the House of why we want the power to vary the corporation tax rate and why we want to lower it. It is not to make the fat cats of business any fatter; rather, it will address some fundamental flaws that have been in our economy for decades. Those include under-productivity and lagging behind the UK average in our prosperity. It will make our citizens better off by creating the environment in which businesspeople can generate the jobs that create the income that yields the taxes that fund excellence in our public services.

In conclusion, this is an opportunity to show the indigenous and international business communities that we, as an Assembly and an Executive, are up to the challenge of transmitting the message of political cohesion and confidence that they are looking for. Finally, if I may refer back to Mr Lunn’s contribution and his honesty in admitting about the one that got away, I am interested to know what he first thought when he heard the Beatles and whether that is why he is not the Alliance Party’s music spokesman.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Lynch, I remind the House that it is

the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le muintir Fhear Manach agus Thír Eoghain Theas as deis a thabhairt domh bheith i mo Chomhalta den Teach seo. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone who elected me as a Sinn Féin Member of the House.

In thinking about my speech, I was interested in what a Member from the opposite Bench Mr David McIlveen said in his maiden speech a number of weeks ago. He dedicated his victory to his grandmother, an Irish republican, Mrs Evelyn Margaret McIlveen, who hailed from Bailieborough in County Cavan. My grandmother Margaret Hogg came from the Protestant tradition. She was a Methodist, but she changed her religion when she married at the time of partition. She suffered as a result, and it is from her side of the family that I get my republican beliefs. Mr McIlveen said that he was glad that he could be found on the side of the House on which he sits. Tá mé an-bhródúil a bheith ar an taobh seo den Teach mar phoblachtánach. Equally, I am proud to be on this side of the House as an Irish republican.

Our stories highlight the fact that we are not that far apart despite our histories. If we go back a few more generations to the late 1700s, when the United Irishmen and United Irishwomen fought for separation from England, we see that they consisted mainly of people from the Protestant tradition. It is my hope and vision that we all converge on the same path and build an Ireland that we can be proud of and which reflects our traditions. I dedicate my speech not to any one individual but to my family, particularly my parents, who are in their eighties and nineties and are currently in Donegal, and to my friends and comrades who placed their trust in me during many years of personal struggle.

I move to the motion. Devolution of corporation tax powers is a complex issue. I am not an economist. However, many stakeholders believe that it is one of the key economic levers that can rebalance and kick-start the economy in the North of Ireland. Some experts estimate that over 90,000 new jobs can be created over 20 years by reducing the rate of corporation tax. Central to the argument for reduction is the premise that the probability of attracting foreign

direct investment will be enhanced. Attracting FDI is seen as the way to create high-skilled and high-wage jobs. It is also assumed that lower corporation tax will encourage businesspeople to reinvest.

However, I have spoken to businesspeople in my constituency and attended a recent conference on the issue in Enniskillen. To say the least, many are not convinced that all boats will rise with the tide of FDI, particularly in a county that has to rely on indigenous business to sustain the local economy. Fermanagh could be further disadvantaged due to the fact that it relies mostly on the public sector. Any move on corporation tax should be used not as a tool to downsize the public sector but a lever to rebalance the private sector with the public sector.

I contend that, at the macro level, a lower corporation tax level can be an advantage in driving the economy forward but it should not be viewed in isolation. High levels of educational attainment, an increased skills level, increased research and development spending, and increased investment in training all have a part to play in developing a sustainable economy. We must continue to support and, indeed, increase our efforts with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises.

I support the motion, in principle, as a first step towards taking responsibility for influencing the future sustainability of our economy and harmonising corporate tax rates throughout the island of Ireland, particularly for border constituencies, such as Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

Ms Ritchie: I very much welcome the debate, which is extremely timely. Our thanks are due to the two Committees that have set it up. The debate comes at a time when the Treasury consultation on devolving tax-varying powers to the Northern Ireland Executive is drawing to a close. It comes just before the time when really detailed engagement on the cost of lowering corporation tax in the North is due to begin.

12.30 pm

I have made it clear many times that the SDLP's position is one of strong support for the devolution of tax-varying powers to the Northern Ireland Executive and for the subsequent lowering of corporation tax, although I recognise the fact that there is a downside in the cost, which I will

come to later. We also believe in varying other taxes, and we have argued repeatedly that, if we are to move our economy out of recession and onto a new growth trajectory, we need to take control of more economic levers.

The ability to vary taxation in the North is a major new economic lever, and even though it comes at a price, it must be cost-neutral to the Treasury, and, therefore, we have to grab it with both hands. Given our failure to do much for the economy using the only other economic lever currently available to us, which is public expenditure, with our, I suppose, policy-lazy and unimaginative Budget, we must surely try to make the most of this opportunity.

Happily, the vast majority of public representatives and the five parties in the Executive are fully behind a lower rate of corporation tax. However, although some of the trade unions and the MP for South Down — sorry, North Down, I hasten to correct myself — are opposed to a lower rate of corporation tax, I am particularly concerned about one politician, our Finance Minister, Mr Wilson. Not only has he stated his scepticism on numerous occasions but he has made it clear that he does not share his party's enthusiasm for a lower rate of corporation tax. I will go further. On a spectrum of support for lowering the rate of corporation tax, Mr Wilson is closer to the outright opposition of Lady Hermon than to the unequivocally in-favour position of his DUP colleague, the Enterprise Minister, and he is completely at odds with the position of his colleague and party leader, the First Minister, who not only supports the lowering of corporation tax but argues that it should go below 12.5% to 10%, a point already referred to by my colleague Mr Bradley.

I know that the DUP is an increasingly broad church, which we welcome. However, in this case, the problem is that the dissenter is the Finance Minister, and he is the person whose job it is to lead the team that will negotiate the terms and, ultimately, the cost to all of us of lowering the rate of corporation tax. How can he lead a successful negotiation for a concession that he does not believe in? How can he make sure that the cost is closer to, say, £100 million than £500 million if he does not believe in the project in the first place? I believe that his opposition is fundamentally misplaced. As with the Budget, there is a policy-laziness and a lack of imagination at work in DFP. His position is one of excessive caution and fear of change,

masquerading as prudent management. So who should lead the negotiation on the ultimate cost of this proposition?

Let me immediately correct myself and tell you that, when I raised the matter with the Chancellor of the Exchequer at our meeting last week, he told me that there would be a price but not a negotiation. The cost of lowering the rate of corporation tax would be determined independently by the Office for Budget Responsibility. However, although the Chancellor has kindly described the process, he is wrong about the negotiation because no instant calculation can objectively determine the correct cost to the Treasury of lowering the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. Too many fundamental assumptions are open to question, and there are many complex and debatable variations in that calculation.

Ultimately, the bottom-line figure will be arrived at following intensive discussions between economists and their political masters from all sides, and that is effectively a negotiation. It is not only prudent but vital to our interests that we put forward the strongest possible economic argument for the lower end of the range of possible costs, and the only people whom I have heard put forward a credible argument here are from outside the government service.

Let us be clear: we fully support the lowering of the rate of corporation tax, while recognising the downside.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Ritchie: We believe that Northern Ireland must put its best foot forward.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion.

There is no doubt that there is a real need to grow the economy in Northern Ireland, as the current balance is considered overly dependent on the public sector. Our economy needs to be driven more by the private sector. With a vibrant private sector, Northern Ireland would benefit greatly from more wealth and prosperity, economic opportunities and jobs through new investment. A reduction in corporation tax would encourage investment and provide a much-needed boost to our local economy, which has, unfortunately, become too dependent on the public sector.

Much of the current infrastructure is already well placed to complement a competitive and vibrant private sector. Northern Ireland enjoys good transport links, a modern telecommunications framework and, thanks to our two leading universities, an excellent skills base. Although there is always room for improvement in those areas, we currently have a good base from which to start as we seek to grow Northern Ireland and make this country the best place to do business.

Foreign direct investment has the potential to be highly successful in achieving the required rebalancing of the economy. However, it also depends on a corporation tax rate that will enable Northern Ireland to close the gap with the rest of the UK and compete for investment with the Republic of Ireland, which currently has a tax rate of 12.5%. That rate looks set to continue long into the future.

A reduction in the rate of corporation tax is a long-term policy, as it is a long-term economic plan designed to benefit this country and ensure a prosperous future. It is inevitable that such a reduction in corporation tax will have short-term effects. One such impact that we will have to face is a reduction in the block grant. This is a central issue, and it is important to have clarity on it. It is imperative that we do not create an extra burden on ourselves by reducing public spending. It would be foolish significantly to reduce public spending in areas that help to attract and maintain a good business-friendly environment. It is essential that we are not short-changed and that we get a good deal.

There is clear evidence that a reduction in the rate of corporation tax would attract FDI to Northern Ireland. We require more direct manufacturing jobs. Northern Ireland must return to being a place where engineers carry out research and development on future projects, which they take through to development, production and manufacturing in a competitive marketplace. Having listened to the views of important professional bodies, such as Invest NI and the Federation of Small Businesses, who are undoubtedly better placed than many of us in the House today to assess the benefits of reducing corporation tax, I feel that this is an opportunity to bring real and lasting benefit to our economy.

Mr Allister: The Member said that he had listened to views. The one report not mentioned

in the debate — doubtless, the Member has read it — is that by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). Will he comment on the fact that it states that there is no clear evidence of a correlation between low corporation tax, per se, and high levels of FDI? The Member seems to think that it is a magic formula for increasing FDI. What about the PWC report?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dunne: Throughout the world, the evidence is that a reduction in corporation tax leads to significant improvements. Some like to regard it as a tax reduction that will benefit only the large multinational companies. However, the FSB's recent survey in May 2011 concluded that the overwhelming majority of owners of small businesses in Northern Ireland believed that the lowering of corporation tax would have a positive impact on the local economy. It concluded that that would help to improve the conditions for a competitive, business-friendly environment.

For too long, our manufacturing has been unable to compete against the rest of the world. We now seek to compete with countries in the Far East, such as China. I am aware of a large manufacturing company in Belfast that is involved in government contracts. It sources material locally, sends it to Vietnam for sub-assembly, and returns that to Belfast for final installation in the completed product.

It is important that we do all we can to expand and advance our already well-established aerospace and pharmaceutical industries and further help to promote our proud reputation for innovation and invention across the spectrum of industries. We need to be able to compete competitively again in the world market and see an increase in foreign investors who will develop our skills, grow our economy with increased productivity, increase employment —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Dunne: — and help to create a more prosperous future for our country. We need to demonstrate to the world that Northern Ireland is open for business. I support the motion.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat. Comhghairdeas, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, as do phost nua. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the motion and the plans to devolve corporation tax to this Assembly. For many years, we have argued that fiscal powers should be transferred to this Assembly and that decisions on the rates of taxation that should be set need to be taken by locally appointed Ministers.

The potential for devolved corporation tax is only one small part of this. This debate is not about a reduction in corporation tax but the devolution of the powers to set the rate. Whether or not one agrees with a reduction in corporation tax is not the issue at hand. If we manage to get these powers devolved, then we can begin a discussion on what the actual rate will be.

There is a corporation tax rate of 12.5% in the South. That has often been heralded as the main reason why so many foreign investors decided to locate there. It may have been one reason, but it surely was not the only one. Huge multinational companies decided to locate in the South as a result of a wide range of factors, including a high number of skilled people willing to work, a young and educated population, widespread use of the English language, and a decent level of infrastructure investment.

Mr A Maginness: I listened carefully to what the Member said. He referred to the skills base in the South and a young, well-educated population. Does that description not exactly suit our own situation here in Northern Ireland? However, the one thing that is different is the corporation tax rate. Is that not really an argument in favour of a reduction in corporation tax and the centrality of that in transforming the economy?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Flanagan: I am quite baffled by the question. There was quite a bit in there that I missed, but I will go on, and if the Member wishes to intervene again, he can.

A lot of the jobs that were created have now disappeared, and we have seen how quickly that can happen. Those measures that I referred to, and to which the Member referred as well, are the kind of things that we need to put in place to ensure that our economy, in particular our private sector, is enabled to grow sustainably.

We also need to work on the basis of co-operation, as opposed to competition, to grow our all-island economy. For too long, the

argument has been put forward that in the North we are over-reliant on our public sector and handouts from the British Government. Yet the British Government tell us all this without the knowledge of how much tax, including corporation tax, is accrued here.

Before the Assembly can take a decision on what any future rate of corporation tax will be, we need full clarity on what the implications may be for the block grant and our public services. At present, those implications are unclear. The future of our economic success is not simply a matter for DFP or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). As we all know, growing our economy is the responsibility of many Departments and of the Executive as a whole.

We rely on our education system to ensure that young people receive the right training, advice and support to equip themselves for a fast-moving and challenging economy. We need proper investment in our road network and telecommunications infrastructure to ensure that businesses can compete, transport goods and communicate effectively. We also need to see reform on how procurement takes place so that small and medium-sized enterprises can have access to public contracts, limited though they may be at present.

In the past, much of the focus was on attracting foreign direct investment to create jobs and grow our economy. We, as an Assembly, need to realise that the people who will grow our economy in a sustainable way are those who live here and those who have an entrepreneurial spirit. Those are the people who require our help.

Mr Nesbitt referred to Invest NI, and there has been a lot of focus on its work. It is clear that it is going to have to change its tactics for attracting foreign direct investment, as a result of the abolition of SFA from 2013.

12.45 pm

We also need to ensure that any additional revenues that are generated from increased taxation — income tax, VAT and National Insurance contributions — are retained by the Executive. That is particularly important given the threat of a cut to the block grant, although, as I have said before, the British Treasury has no idea what size any cut might be.

This debate has been going on for quite a while, and opinions have been mixed across society. Mr Lynch referred to some of the scepticism in Fermanagh. I look forward to this debate gaining momentum and to a full and frank discussion taking place from this point on.

Whether any potential reduction in corporation tax would benefit our small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in areas west of the Bann, is questionable. We need to see a wide range of measures being put in place to sustainably grow our economy. Those must include a job creation strategy and continued investment in education, skills and infrastructure. We must focus on supporting our indigenous businesses as well as growing our tourism and agrifood sectors and putting measures in place to ensure that the benefits of any reduction in corporation tax are felt across our society and not just within big business. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Ross: There has been recognition from virtually everyone that lowering the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland will not be the silver bullet to transform our economy. Mr Hamilton, in his opening comments, said it would not be a panacea. Ms Ritchie was unfair on the Finance Minister when she said that he was reluctant to take this step. He is right to inject some realism into this and say that it is not going to be a panacea. In 2007, the Finance Minister spoke about how devolution would not be the panacea for all our ills, even though it would be significantly better for us than direct rule. Lowering corporation tax would be significantly better for us by transforming our economy, rather than us continuing as we are. Although all of the Ministers have been careful to say that it is not a silver bullet, we have agreed that the devolution of corporation tax powers will be a significant lever in our economic toolkit.

I listened to the Chairman of the Finance Committee, and I must disagree with him, because this is not about harmonisation of taxation across Ireland; it is very much about competitiveness. Just as businesses in Northern Ireland are at a disadvantage when it comes to air passenger duty because we share a land border with another EU region, this is another prime example of how business in Northern Ireland is at a disadvantage, due to the adjoining nation having a lower rate of corporation tax.

I look around the world to places where there are lower rates of corporation tax. The Secretary of State is always very keen on pointing to Canada and the results that it saw when it reduced corporation tax. In Europe, we can look at Estonia; we can look at Singapore. All of those areas have had lower rates of corporation tax and have been successful in attracting more investment. Indeed, the national Government at Westminster have modestly reduced the rate of corporation tax for the United Kingdom, which is recognition from Treasury that it can have a positive impact in stimulating the economy.

Of course, lowering corporation tax must sit alongside other fiscal and economic levers that this Executive can operate. It will attract further foreign direct investment in coming years, but there are other things that businesses will look at. Yesterday, I spoke about university funding and making sure that we continue to have a highly skilled graduate workforce. After companies look at the rate of corporation tax, they will look at the quality of the education system and the type of graduates that are coming out of our universities. Indeed, they will look at the quality of our universities, as well as at telecommunications, infrastructure and all those sorts of issues.

One of the key points is that having a lower rate of corporation tax gives Northern Ireland a unique selling point. When Invest NI or businesses look for investment, the lower rate of corporation tax will be a very attractive proposition for companies before they look at some of the other things that Northern Ireland has to offer. It is very much about our getting a foot in the door.

It is telling that lower corporation tax is supported not only by Members, but, as Mr McIlveen said, by members of the business community, including small businesses. Although small businesses might not directly benefit from a lower rate of corporation tax, they recognise that further job creation in Northern Ireland will have a knock-on effect down the supply line, and everyone can benefit from that.

There is a need to grow the private sector in Northern Ireland so that we become less reliant on the public sector. Lowering the rate of corporation tax could well be the tool that we need to help rebalance our economy and ensure that, in future years, the gap in the standard of living between people in Northern Ireland and

those in the remainder of the United Kingdom is closed. I fear that if we do not do something quite dramatic, that gap will continue to be as wide as it is today.

We said that corporation tax can increase FDI. An independent economic advisory group suggested that there could be up to 58,000 new jobs created by 2030. That would be around 3,500 to 4,500 new jobs a year. We need to make sure that we are ready for this. As I said, it is not just the high-end graduate jobs but jobs further down the supply chain and local indigenous businesses that can benefit.

As Members have said, it will also help us to become more of an exporting economy, which is something that Northern Ireland needs to move to in future years. Indeed, even the more modest projections and assumptions point to the reduction of corporation tax as having a positive impact on the Northern Ireland economy.

It is important to say that, although it will stimulate the local economy, it is important that we get a fair deal from Treasury in getting the powers to lower corporation tax. Of course there will be a cost to the Executive, and that has to be taken into account, but I believe that that can be managed. It should not be viewed as a barrier but as an investment in our economy and in this country to grow our private sector and create more jobs in the future.

I believe that, if we can get the power to do that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ross: It is important that the Executive plan it carefully and that we can see the realisation of a more vibrant private sector in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hussey: I begin by commenting on the many languages that have been used here today. We have had Irish, Latin and English, and it was good to hear one of the Members on the other Benches comment that one of the strong selling points of the Irish Republic is the ability of people there to use the English language. It is good to see that the ability to speak English is something that we should be taking forward.

In the past, the Minister suggested that my speech was written by Owen Paterson. I can assure him today that the only Owen in my speech is Tír Eoghain, and County Tyrone at that. I hope you can understand my Tyrone

accent today, Minister; I will speak slowly for your benefit.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. As a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I thank all those who spoke before me, and I thank the Committees for bringing the issue to the House. The rebalancing and growth of the Northern Ireland economy is the number one priority for the Assembly throughout this mandate, and we must work to make sure that we deliver for the people of Northern Ireland on that front. Let me state from the outset, as my colleagues have done, that the Ulster Unionist Party is in favour of devolving the setting of the rate of corporation tax to Northern Ireland. We recognise the unique situation that Northern Ireland finds itself in, with a vast over-reliance on the public sector and a land border with the Republic of Ireland, which has a very low rate of corporation tax at 12.5%.

Devolving corporation tax powers has been at the forefront of discussions around addressing the economic problems before us. It has been a much-debated topic, and it has received support from the majority of the House. However, today I want to deal with two main issues that are imperative to the success of the devolution of corporation tax powers: the effect that a decrease would have on the Northern Ireland block grant, and how a decrease would be administered.

First, the devolution of corporation tax powers will have obvious consequences for the Northern Ireland block grant, given the Azores ruling. At present, the cost to the block grant that is being mooted is far too high. However, there seems to be some disagreement as to what the figure actually is. The estimates provided by her Majesty's Treasury differ significantly from those provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Last year, DFP calculated that the cost to the block grant would be in the region of £400 million by year 5, whereas the two estimates by the Treasury put that figure at between £225 million and £270 million by year 5. Although I appreciate that those figures are estimates that have been done at a fairly early stage in the process, further work must be carried out to find out precisely how much our block grant would be reduced by should a decrease in corporation tax be taken forward.

Secondly, I want to deal with how the devolution of corporation tax powers would be administered.

That is an area that we need to think about now, as it impacts heavily on the cost of devolving corporation tax powers. The two obvious options would be that the corporation tax is charged so that it is administered by the Department of Finance and Personnel through Land and Property Services, or it could remain as it is now, and continue to be administered by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

The advantages and disadvantages of both options need to be given serious thought. However, the main issue with the administration of the tax is that Northern Ireland should have the ability to decrease the rate of corporation tax without taking the final decision on by how much it should be reduced. That would give the Northern Ireland Executive the time and latitude to consider what is best for the Northern Ireland economy and to react to an ever-changing economic environment.

Finally, I want to reiterate what a number of Members have said already in the debate, which is that the devolution of corporation tax is neither a silver bullet nor a panacea for the Northern Ireland economy. It needs to work in conjunction with a number of other initiatives. Nevertheless, the benefits that it can bring will be tangible for the people of Northern Ireland, in the form of more jobs and greater economic growth. I, too, was an insurance official, but, unlike Mr Lunn, I would have thought a little bit harder about Norbrook, and I might have taken the risk and gone with it. However, that decision has passed us by. I look forward to greater economic growth in the Province, and, for that reason, I support the motion.

Lord Morrow: I have listened intently to what Members have said in the debate. I do not want to be the Job among everyone, but I suspect that I may be, because I do not share the total enthusiasm that has been demonstrated today. The old adage of the need to be careful of Greeks bearing gifts is very appropriate in this case. We have some very good examples, at which we should take a long, close, hard look.

I am pleased in two respects. First, that the motion contains the phrase, "in principle". I am glad that that is there. Secondly, I am glad that the leader of the SDLP brought it to our attention that the Finance Minister is cautious. I congratulate him on that. That is a sign of maturity, not of weakness, and it demonstrates to me that, in fact, he is not going to jump in

with both feet and say that everything is well and wonderful because we have got corporation tax down to 12.5%. Let it be clearly said that there is no such thing as a free lunch. We will learn that very shortly, if and when the powers are devolved.

I would like the Minister, when he sums up today, to tell us exactly what this is going to cost to get corporation tax down to 12.5%. I have no doubt that he will, because he is more than capable of doing it. I hear and read about all sorts of figures. I have heard £400 million, £300 million and £200 million mentioned. I do not know which of those is true, or, indeed, if any is true, but I suspect that the figure of £300 million may not be far away.

Very recently, the computer company Dell withdrew its entire operation from its base in Limerick and relocated to Poland. We all know that the corporation tax rate in the Republic of Ireland is 12.5%. We also know that the rate in Poland is 19%, but that did not stop Dell from uprooting and taking its whole operation there. The rate of corporation tax in Poland is 50% higher than that in the Republic of Ireland. The lower corporation tax rate did not keep Dell in Limerick. It may have kept it there for a while, but Dell saw other opportunities in Poland and moved there.

Not every Member said that the devolution of corporation tax is a panacea for all our economic troubles. It is anything but. If we were to speak to 10 different economists about corporation tax — I will not name them or embarrass them — and ask them the specific question of where on a scale of one to 10 they would put the importance of lowering the rate of corporation tax, they would put it at six or seven.

In other words, at least six other issues are more important than corporation tax. I wonder what they could be. I believe that the cost of labour is certainly one of them and that educational attainment is another, as is a stable society. Those are three things that will help to move our economy in the right direction.

1.00 pm

It also has to be said that a major international computer company recently selected Northern Ireland as its European research base. Its managing director confirmed that tax was not an issue. So, I say to the House and to the Minister — I do not think that the Minister needs it said,

but I will say it anyway — that we need to be cautious.

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

Lord Morrow: I am happy that the Minister is in that mode, and I have no doubt that he will bring a common-sense approach to all this.

Dr McDonnell: The SDLP's position on corporation tax is clear and has been consistent not just for a few years but for 15 or 16 years. Indeed, many years ago, when some of us went to Pittsburgh for the second White House conference, it was the famous Tony O'Reilly who convinced me on the matter. If the Executive are serious about governing in an effective and efficient way and about creating effective and efficient economic benefits for businesses here and for the people of Northern Ireland, I would be in favour of devolving not just corporation tax powers — that should be done first — but all tax powers locally, so that we can have much greater influence on what we do and how we do it.

To maximise the impact and create a level playing field across the island of Ireland, the rate should be set at 12.5%. The power to devolve tax cannot be separated from the level of the tax, and to focus on devolving powers without reference to setting a competitive rate would be to render this debate meaningless. There is absolutely no point in taking the power if we do not use it. I believe that that rate would dramatically change our economic landscape in a relatively short time.

All too often here, whenever we discuss our economy, we talk about the block grant and how we might tweak it a bit here or there. However, there is much more to our economy than working with the block grant. Only this morning, I was at a business breakfast seminar in Belfast City Hall. The focus of the event was on enhancing Belfast's competitiveness, and, time and again throughout the discussion, economists, businesspeople and other political representatives brought up the importance and value of a lower rate of corporation tax. It is clearly seen as a tool with which to build a bigger and better private sector.

Far too often in Northern Ireland, we have a habit of knocking ourselves, encasing ourselves in silos or restricting ourselves under a glass ceiling, with a cannot-do as opposed to a can-do attitude. However, we should not lose sight

of the fact that Northern Ireland has lots of positives to offer to investors. To ensure that we build a bigger, stronger and better private sector, as well as reducing corporation tax, we must bundle those positives. We have a large pool of skilled, cost-effective labour. Although it may not be as cost-effective as some inward investors would like, compared with the labour markets in London, Dublin and the main European cities, it is relatively cost-effective. Beyond labour costs, we have a relatively low cost base. We are in a prime location for trading and for exports. Our tourist industry has huge potential. We have a very strong IT sector, and we have the devolved Assembly and Executive.

We have the powers to make choices and decisions for the benefit of Northern Ireland. The devolution of corporation tax powers is one decision that we must make. In a relatively short time, it will enable fair competition and dramatically increase the economic attractiveness of Northern Ireland. Corporation tax at a competitive rate will, as the evidence overwhelmingly indicates, speed up economic growth. It will bring in foreign direct investment and increase the number of people in well-paid, sustainable jobs. Some people estimate 90,000 new jobs over 20 years. That may be a slight exaggeration, but most commentators talk about more than 64,000 jobs.

The ability of reduced corporation tax to speed up inward investment and economic growth in Northern Ireland is important against the backdrop of the clear intent of the Treasury to slash the block grant. The fact is that a reduced devolved corporation tax will, in the medium to long term, increase tax revenue for the UK and, in turn, help to offset any reduction. That is why it is important that we debate the details of implementing the tax change —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Dr McDonnell: — and make a strong, persuasive case to the Treasury.

Mr Allister: Not for the first time, and, I suspect, not the last, I am somewhat out of step with the consensus in the House. However, I feel a little less lonely since Lord Morrow's contribution. In the Budget debates, the Minister liked to refer to me as Elijah. Well, Elijah and Job probably had quite a lot in common. If the Job of the DUP Benches would like to volunteer as a Teller, I could give him some useful employment in a

few minutes. I hope that he proves more stoical in his resistance to corporation tax powers than he did having started down the same road in respect of policing and justice.

People in the House like to talk about game-changers. The game-changer in regard to corporation tax was the Azores judgement. At a stroke, it revolutionised the debate and made it abundantly and irrefutably clear that, if you go for corporation tax, you must, because of the fiscal autonomy requirements, adjust your block grant. We in Northern Ireland, whether we like it or not, have a huge fiscal deficit, and the block grant is the one thing, as the Minister well knows, that gives certainty to our budgeting. Going down a road where you play fast and loose with the block grant and take risks with it in a state of total blindness because you have no idea of what the actual working figures will be seems to be the absolute height of folly.

Remember, there is no reverse gear when it comes to corporation tax devolution. Therefore, there is supreme danger in sleepwalking into a situation in which we devastate the block grant for the sake of some sort of aspiration. All that I have heard in this debate is aspirations; I have not heard any reality talked at all. The volatility of the receipts from corporation tax makes anyone who thinks seriously about it back away pretty fast, just as the Welsh have. It is on the point of the volatility.

Much nonsense has been talked about the impact that it would have on foreign direct investment. I remind the House that the Irish Republic had low corporation tax from 1958. That did not do it any good in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s and most of the 1980s. It is not the panacea; it is not anywhere close to the panacea. Those who think that it is are sleepwalking —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Certainly.

Lord Morrow: Thank you. It is now Job speaking. I hear what the Member says. I made it clear that some Members said that it was not the panacea or silver bullet. Does the Member accept that it is imperative that the Northern Ireland economy is always competitive and that our nearest rival is the Republic of Ireland?

Mr Allister: Of course. I want to see the economy totally rebalanced in Northern

Ireland. I am not opposed to that at all — far from it. What I am opposed to is taking steps that we then regret and taking steps that distance us from the centrality of our equal citizenship as part of the United Kingdom. There is an ideological issue, which is that common taxation lies in close relationship to common responsibilities and benefits. That is why the party that sits over here — Sinn Féin — is suddenly so ideologically wedded to the reduction in corporation tax. It is not because that party believes in low corporation tax.

I sat in the European Parliament for five years and listened to Bairbre de Brún and her Marxist clique constantly demand soaking the corporations and higher corporation tax. That is their ideology. In the Irish Republic, they fought elections saying that they would introduce higher corporation tax, but, suddenly, because it happens to fit with an overriding political ideology — harmonising taxation on the island of Ireland — they are now the prophets of low corporation tax. They are no such thing. They are the economic illiterates of the House.

Mr Hamilton: I have heard the Member say what he is against. We are well used to hearing what he is against. If he genuinely believes in the rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy, will he tell us what he is for? In all this bluster, we have not heard him suggest anything that would make the step change in the economy that the rest of us are in favour of.

Mr Allister: I suggest that the Member studies the economy of Germany. It has relatively high corporation tax, but it has one of the best success rates in foreign direct investment. Why? Because —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: — it has multiple aspects to its attraction package that make it an attractive place to invest.

Mr Agnew: I support the motion. Like Trevor Lunn, I support in principle the devolution of corporation tax powers and other fiscal powers. We should look at the powers that we have on the whole. However, the real question for me is what we should do with those powers. For that reason, I want to voice the many concerns that I have about some Members' apparent willingness to rush head first into reducing corporation tax to 12.5% or less.

Yesterday, the Assembly passed a Budget that was decimated by cuts passed down from Westminster. Indeed, the Finance Minister seemed to suggest that we should praise him for being able to present any kind of Budget. He even went further and suggested that those who criticised it were nothing but whingers. I do not subscribe to that view, as I opposed the Budget, but I agree that, given the cuts that we have had to face, it was a very difficult Budget to produce. For that reason, I am astonished that we are seeking to voluntarily reduce our block grant further in order to cut corporation tax, which PricewaterhouseCoopers ranks as seventeenth in the list of factors that influence companies that are looking to invest.

A question that the Finance Minister often asks of those of us who dare to propose amendments to his Budget is “Where will the money come from?”. Well, where will the money come from if we reduce corporation tax and have our block grant reduced? We have not had that question answered, and I have yet to hear what cuts to services and job losses will result from that potential cut to the block grant.

There are other potential costs that have yet to be outlined. How much will the administration burden be? I put that question to the Minister, and, as yet, there has been no estimate. Therefore, Members are supporting the reduction in corporation tax without the full facts. My understanding is that the administration costs will be quite significant.

Varney estimated that brass plating could cost us in the region of £80 million in further reductions to the block grant. Another concern that has been raised is that, if the power to reduce corporation tax were devolved and receipts were to drop, would we then seek the introduction of borrowing powers that might be necessary to mitigate that possibility, given that we do not have those powers?

1.15 pm

We know that there will be costs. The costs are guaranteed, but the benefits are purely speculative. Many Members have talked as though the various projected figures on new jobs are guaranteed. They have said that they do not know how many jobs will be created but it will be tens of thousands. We do not know that. At this point, it is speculation.

I welcome Simon Hamilton's contribution that we must consider the matter seriously and look at all aspects of it. In doing so, we should look at the alternatives. I am a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I asked departmental officials what alternatives the proposals were being marked against. The only alternative that they have been marked against is doing nothing. I agree with Members that we should not do nothing; we have to address the state of our economy. I propose that we should at least mark the proposals against investment in the green new deal. The costs are similar, so why not see which has the better outcomes? The green new deal will help not only to boost our economy but to move us towards a lower-carbon economy and to reduce our reliance on ever-diminishing fossil fuels, the prices of which are rising. Let us look at the two proposals and compare them. The benefits of the green new deal are not speculative. There are guaranteed benefits, and, if we invest in it, we will create jobs.

Although I am willing to support the motion —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Agnew: I implore the Finance Minister and the Enterprise Minister to explore the alternatives before we rush head first into a potentially very damaging tax cut.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, will have up to 20 minutes to respond.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): It will be 20 minutes. I thank everyone for contributing to the debate on a very important issue. In fact, it is probably one of the most important policy issues that we will debate, contemplate and, finally, have to make a decision about in this mandate. The issue will have very long-term consequences, potentially positive and negative. Therefore, it is important that the debate be considered and that we have as much input into it as possible.

From my party's point of view, the parameters of the debate and the objectives of the policy are all about what we will do to make the Northern Ireland economy more competitive; it is not about making our economy more like that of the Irish Republic and converging with that economy. Mr Allister sees it as some kind of plot by Sinn Féin to drag us into a fiscal

united Ireland. Indeed, he pointed out that Sinn Féin spokespeople in the European Parliament used to be ranting, left-wing communists. Lots of biblical characters have been mentioned. We have had Job here and Elijah here, and we have Saul of Tarsus over here. They have had a Damascus road experience. They have been converted. I would have thought that Mr Allister would welcome that and not condemn them for it. I would have thought that, in Mr Allister's book, a consideration of more mainstream economic thought would be a benefit rather than something to be criticised for.

Let me make it clear that, as far as we are concerned, this is about what we should do to change the face of the Northern Ireland economy. Member after Member said that. We cannot go on with a situation where we, on average, have 80% of the average GDP in the United Kingdom. We cannot go on with a low-productivity economy. We cannot go on with an economy that is dominated by the public sector. Even the activities that go on in the private sector are very heavily dependent on public sector spending and on low-wage-type activities. We cannot go on that way, and, therefore, we need to look at change.

The economic theory behind it is that one way in which we might do that is to look at how we give fiscal incentives to the private sector to expand. I accept a lot of the points that were made by those who were more sceptical during the debate. It would be foolish of me, as Finance Minister, as an economist or as an observer of real life, to do otherwise. Indeed, many of those who support the change have made it clear that they understand that there is no silver bullet and no panacea. People can pull evidence out from different sources, and some people will point at reports and economic theories that suggest that, if you reduce the tax burden and reward people for the activities that they undertake, they will have an incentive to undertake more of those activities and, if you let them keep their profits, they will have more money to invest and, therefore, to expand their firms. Therefore, there is an incentive effect.

Mr Allister pointed out that the PWC report indicates that that is not necessarily the case, and it is not. You could look at some low-tax economies and find that there has not been that stimulus. As Mr Nesbitt pointed out, when economists look at all those things, if they want to isolate the impact of one variable on the

economy, they have to make an assumption that rarely applies in real life. *Ceteris paribus* — I have got the Latin in as well — or all other things remaining equal is not always the case. Hence, what Mr Allister said about the situation in the Republic is quite true: for a long time, it had a 10% tax rate, and that had no impact. Then it had a 12% tax rate, and that did have an impact because other things changed as well. Therefore, anyone who says with certainty that this will suddenly make the economy grow magically does not understand or has ignored many of the economic complexities.

One thing that we do know is that there are lots of modern examples of how a reduction in corporation tax and in taxes on profits has had a dramatic impact on the rate of growth, not least in the country that is next door to us. For that reason at least, we have to consider it. We cannot simply write it off, as some did during the debate, and say that there are other ways and, therefore, we do not have to consider it. It would be remiss of us to do that. Indeed, if we want to rebalance the economy, we have to look at that.

The second point that I want to make is that, no matter how you look at this, there will be costs involved. Let us not pretend to ourselves that there will not be. I know that some Members said that, in the long run, it will give us more revenue than it will cost us. That depends on what you wish to include in that revenue. We know from all the reports, whether from the Treasury or the EAG, that, in 10 years' time, even with the best of circumstances, we will only break even. The worst report shows that, in 20 years' time, we could still have a negative fiscal impact on this economy, so we have to bear that in mind. Even if it creates 4,500 higher-paid jobs in each of the next 20 years, resulting in a thriving economy that enables young people to stay here, get the rewards that they want while living in a healthier, happier, more prosperous economy that employs more people with a better lifestyle, not much of it, apart from the tax take, will register on our fiscal balance. However, it will change the face of Northern Ireland, which is what the Assembly is here for. It will give the people whom we represent better prospects and enable us to hold on to the best of our talent. For that reason, when we look at the costs and benefits of lowering corporation tax, we cannot look at the fiscal benefits and costs alone and decide that, because of them, we will not go down that route.

That does not mean that we recklessly imperil in the short and medium term our ability to provide public services. The job creation models' predictions vary from 1,500 additional jobs a year to 4,500 a year. Anybody naïve enough to believe that a model can project economic activity and the impact of a policy 20 years in advance does not know a great deal about economic modelling. Many models are lucky to survive two years in our changing circumstances. Those who say that there is an element of faith or gambling involved in economic models are absolutely right. That is why it is imperative that we scrutinise the corporation tax policy to the nth degree in making our decision. That is why a debate such as this — I hope that there are many more like it — is so important.

We have to consider the immediate fiscal burden. People have said that I differ from other Ministers on this, but I do not believe that at all. Ministers have differing responsibilities: some are interested in job creation, and others look at the wider benefits to society. As Finance Minister, my responsibility is to look also at the impact on public finances, because I must produce a Budget every year and we must ensure that Departments do what we want them to. That is why it is important that we consider the costs.

Ms Ritchie said that I was not fit to lead the negotiations because I brought some of those issues to the debate. Indeed, she tried to make me choose between two women: Lady Hermon and Arlene Foster. However, I tell you one thing: had she put herself in that bunch, I would have told her which of them I would not choose. *[Laughter.]* The puppyish devotion that she —

Mr A Maginness: I am going to tell Arlene.

Mr Wilson: I am going to be told on, and I have to fly to London with her later. I will probably get it in the ear.

Adopting a puppyish, wide-eyed devotion to this without bringing to bear any critical faculties is certainly not how to go into corporation tax negotiations with the Treasury.

1.30 pm

When we go to the Treasury, it is important that we are aware of all the pros and cons and that we go in cautiously and go in hard, because there is much to be gained. I cannot remember,

but I think that it was Mr Allister who asked what the upper limit of the cost would be. In any report that I have seen so far, the upper limit is about £355 million a year. If we had to take that as a deficit for the next 20 years, it would, of course, be absolute folly to say that we should go down that route, given all the uncertainty surrounding job creation, etc. Despite what Ms Ritchie said about the Chancellor stating that there would be no negotiation, there will be considerable negotiation. She was correct to say that there would be no negotiation on the amount of income tax. As several Members pointed out, once the amount of income tax has been established, the Azores ruling is that we have to pay whatever the bill happens to be. However, there is considerable variation.

Mr Allister: On that very important point, once that figure is negotiated, is it set in stone? David Gauke, the Exchequer Secretary, told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that, if corporation tax receipts were less than expected, the Northern Ireland Executive would have to deal with that. Clearly, that indicates that you are on your own. Once you set the figures, is that the long-term consequence?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that you raised that point, because I wanted to come to it. I noted the issue of volatility raised by Mr Allister and Mr Agnew. One danger would be that, if receipts went up and down, the block grant would become more volatile. As far as I am concerned, one area of negotiation that would be open to us is where those variations occur, and there will be variations. Over the past five years, the percentage of corporation tax collected in Northern Ireland has varied between 1.6% and 1.1% of the United Kingdom total. Therefore, there is considerable variation over the economic cycle. Although we would have to pay the bill, there would be an acceptance that those variations could be evened out through adjustments to the block grant. Therefore, in the good years, we would probably pay back, and, in the bad years, we would take in. Although it is not impossible to deal with that, it is an issue, and the Member was right to raise it.

Of course, other issues are open to negotiation. The Treasury assumed a profit movement of, I think, £70 million. The Azores ruling does not require that to be attached to the bill. Although the Treasury assumed that profit movement, it might never materialise. Indeed, in discussions that DETI officials had with Europe, it was made

clear that any profit movement would, of course, come under the Azores ruling, but that it could be decided after the event, rather than being anticipated and added to the bill. We want to negotiate that with the Treasury.

If the investment were to succeed, the other thing that could help to offset the cost would be counting in the additional receipts from National Insurance contributions, additional VAT receipts and PAYE, because more people would be employed. That could have a considerable offsetting effect — up to 20% of the total bill — which would reduce the impact of the reduction in the block grant.

The administration figure has not been decided, although we have received some indicative figures. However, given that I know that a tax should not cost a disproportionate amount of money to collect, either in administration or compliance, the figures struck me as very high. That is another area that we would want to negotiate with the Treasury. When trying to reduce the size of the public sector here, it would be ironic to set up in Northern Ireland a parallel tax-collecting system, which would not have the benefit of economies of scale, etc. Anyway, firms would not want to deal with two different tax offices. So, I would rather see it kept with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HRMC) and the cost set at a realistic level.

Other suggestions have been made as to how the cost might be reduced. I am glad to see that the Ulster Unionist Party has demurred from its past position on how to reduce the costs. In its manifesto, it had a rather enigmatic phrase; it said that we could offset the cost by looking innovatively at business rates. I do not know what that means. I see Mr Cree in the Chamber, so he might want to tell us what it means. The only way that I can see how you would look innovatively at business rates is if you said, "For the reduction in corporation tax, we are going to put up business rates." If we were to do it, and we had the maximum figure, you are talking about a 60% increase in business rates, which would apply even to those small businesses that do not benefit from corporation tax changes. I suspect that that is one of those policies that the Ulster Unionist Party thought was clever at the time but which it has decided it does not want to pursue any longer. It is surprising that three of its Members who spoke in the debate never mentioned it. Maybe that is another one that it has dropped from its manifesto.

It has also been suggested that a new rate could be introduced incrementally. I am not so sure that I agree with that, because all the evidence so far shows that corporation tax is not an end in itself; it is simply a means of getting the door opened when we go to talk to foreign firms to try to get them to invest in Northern Ireland. It is the appetiser. Then, when the real tax accountants in the firm get to it, they look for such things as tax credits, the cost of labour, etc. If it is the door-opener and simply the means of getting listened to, why would we reduce it incrementally? A reduction to 18% will cost us but will not get the door open; a reduction to 16% will cost us but will not get the door open; and a reduction to 14% will cost us but will not get the door open.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Wilson: I will.

You would be paying the cost, but you would not be getting the benefit.

I have not got to deal with all the points that were raised in the debate. It has been a useful debate. I am sure that there will be many more debates about the issue. It is one that the Executive, the Assembly and Committees are going to have to address.

Lord Morrow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister is out of time.

Mr Wilson: Therefore, it is important that there is a debate not only among the wider public, but in the Assembly, so that we come to a considered decision on what will have long-term consequences, good or bad, for the economy of Northern Ireland long after many of the Members who are sitting in the Chamber are gone.

Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I welcome the debate and thank the Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee, in particular, for proposing the motion. I apologise to him for being late into the Chamber. I did not hear all of his remarks, because I was held up at a Justice Committee meeting.

I echo what the Minister has just said. This has been a very useful debate. It has also been a very mature debate, and the consensus in the

Chamber was quite properly challenged by those who reserve a more sceptical position on the devolution of corporation tax powers and the reduction of corporation tax. Those interventions were useful in challenging a consensus in the Chamber, because it is important that we examine and address all the issues that arise. There are many difficult issues involved in, first, the transfer of the tax and, secondly, the lowering of the tax, which is the ultimate objective.

I welcome this opportunity to speak as Chair of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee on this very important and pressing issue. It has been just over a year since the two Committees co-sponsored the first debate on corporation tax in the Chamber. There has been much discussion on the matter since, and much has been written on the issue. As Mitchel McLaughlin said, it has taken time to gather momentum, but we have reached the stage at which there is an air of expectation both within and without the Chamber that the powers will be devolved to the Assembly.

In opening the debate as Chair of the Finance Committee, Mr Murphy highlighted the obstacles that we will have to overcome and the practical concerns on which we require clarification and agreement before corporation tax is devolved. We need to know where we stand on the impact on the block grant; on compliance with the Azores ruling; on the level of corporation tax collected here; and on the measures to be put in place to counter so-called tax tourism, which is an important issue. Very importantly, we need clarity on the mechanism to be developed to ensure that we retain the benefits of any increase in revenue from other taxes.

There will be costs in the short term to pay for this opportunity. It is an opportunity, and that is how we should view it. As Mitchel McLaughlin said, it is not risk-free, but if we are to move forward, we have to take some risks. We should recognise the opportunities that exist.

It is appropriate that I concentrate on the longer-term future and on the opportunities and benefits that a reduced rate of corporation tax can bring. It is sometimes said that corporation tax is not the only factor, or, in many cases, the most important factor in determining where a foreign company will invest. That point was made by Simon Hamilton and others. Factors such as transport, logistics, infrastructure, labour costs, productivity, telecommunications infrastructure,

education and skills are considered equally or even more important. However, as the Prime Minister, David Cameron, said in the Chamber earlier this month about us:

"You have excellent transport connections to the rest of the UK, to Ireland and to the rest of Europe. You have the English language; great educational results; two brilliant universities; highly competitive operating costs; 100 broadband access; Project Kelvin, linking north America, Northern Ireland and western Europe; a strongly pro-business climate".

Those are important factors to remember, and it was timely that the Prime Minister reminded us of them.

Although having a competitive rate of corporation tax is not the only important factor, it is one of the few for which we currently do not possess responsibility. That is the point that I was attempting to make to Mr Flanagan in my intervention. That is why it is so important that those powers be devolved as soon as possible. We need to rebalance our economy through growing the private sector. We must develop an economy that is driven by the private sector and that creates more wealth, more economic opportunities and more jobs through new inward investment. We need an economy that provides opportunities for our indigenous businesses, large and small, to grow and prosper.

Dominic Bradley said that the current tools are simply not working. That was echoed by David McIlveen and other Members. Albert Einstein was quoted earlier in the debate in respect of $E=mc^2$, but I will quote him again:

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

Let us think on that. Control over corporation tax is an example of the new type of thinking that we need to embrace if we are to solve the economic problems that we face today. Perhaps this is the "something better" that Simon Hamilton referred to in his speech. He emphasised the point that we cannot have more of the same but must move on. I listened carefully to Mr Allister, but the point must be made that we are moving to a situation post-2013 when we will not have state aid for many business enterprises coming here. What do we do in such circumstances? We must have some alternative strategy.

1.45 pm

Attracting business and more investment, and providing opportunities for businesses to grow, will, inevitably, bring jobs. Treasury estimates for domestic investments are up to £65 million in the first year alone. That is considerable. Treasury estimates for foreign direct investment are for an increase of up to £200 million in the first year. Again, that is very substantial. The Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group estimates up to 90,000 new jobs over 20 years. In a statement, Almac, one of our leading and most respected indigenous businesses, said that it would double its workforce of 2,000 if corporation tax were reduced. That is not only encouraging but, if mirrored by other companies, suggests that the figures are not simply aspirational or optimistic but achievable. It begs the question: what would Sir Allen McClay have achieved with a 12.5% corporation tax in Northern Ireland?

As was mentioned by Mike Nesbitt, another key reason for decreasing the rate of corporation tax is the need to narrow the productivity gap with Britain. That is a key aspect of the previous Programme for Government and DETI's regional innovation strategy. We have got to narrow that gap. This is one way of doing that.

Although some short-term sacrifice may be associated with decreasing the rate of corporation tax, as we attract investment, grow the economy and create more employment, there will be increased tax benefits through additional revenue from increased income tax, National Insurance, VAT and excise duty. Those benefits will be realised in the long term, but it is important that we, who are charged with planning for the long term, look beyond the horizon and plan for a brighter, more prosperous time for future generations. A lower rate of corporation tax can make an enormous contribution to that.

I recognise the scepticism expressed by Mr Allister and Mr Agnew. Mr Agnew referred to the green new deal. The green new deal is not incompatible with lower corporation tax. The green new deal and the devolution of corporation tax are not mutually exclusive.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly supports, in principle, the case for the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and looks forward to the outcome of the HM Treasury consultation on 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy', the provision of further information on the associated costs and benefits, and the development of more detailed proposals for implementing and exercising the powers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Due to Question Time starting at 2.00 pm, the Assembly will suspend until that time.

The sitting was suspended at 1.48 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Arts: EU Funding

1. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the uptake of EU funding by arts and cultural organisations in the 2010-11 financial year. (AQO 207/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. My Department delivers arts and cultural services through arm's-length bodies such as the Arts Council and the Armagh Observatory. The Arts Council proactively encourages its funded organisations to make use of European funding. It also works closely with Visiting Arts, the managing authority for the EU culture programme, hosting workshops to assist the application process. However, information on uptake will not be available until September this year, when the results of the Arts Council-funded organisations survey are complete. I am aware that, in recent years, arts organisations have used funds under the culture programme and the lifelong learning programme. In 2010 and 2011, the Armagh Observatory obtained EU funding of £250,000 for three projects. That will help the observatory's offering to primary schoolchildren.

Dr McDonnell: Has the Minister got any plans to take action, and, if so, what action will she take, to encourage local arts and cultural organisations to better access funding from the EU and elsewhere?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that, recently, some groups, particularly in the Member's area of south Belfast, have asked to meet me to discuss how smaller groups can have better access to European funds. The Member will be aware that larger groups with international partners have successfully achieved funds on their own. However, I will talk to the Arts Council to ensure that smaller groups, single artists and artists' collections will have better use of

European funding in the future. I welcome the Member's advice or views on any particular issue.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister think that the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels could do more to help her Department to access potential funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department liaises with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's (OFMDFM) office in Brussels to try to access better opportunities for European funding. I know that the creative industries in particular have been very successful in securing funding. As regards reviews and lessons learned, sure there is always room for improvement. I am quite happy with progress to date. I am concerned about smaller groups' access to funding. That is primarily my arm's-length bodies' responsibility, rather than OFMDFM's.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister undertake to increase the level of engagement by her Department and arm's-length bodies in the EU, including establishing a greater presence in the bureau in Brussels and applying much greater focus on the potential of the EU culture fund?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. It is similar to the question that John McCallister asked. I will keep a watchful eye on specific programmes, including those relating to fisheries and creative industries, and even on better use of structural funds or funds for culture, arts and leisure. Although there may be different programmes and progress in some areas and sectors, clearly, the perception exists that a lot of money is distributed from Europe but that local people cannot access it. Therefore, through liaison with the Brussels end of things and even with groups on the ground, I will, certainly, keep a watchful eye on the issue and will bring it back in the new term.

Commonwealth Games 2014

2. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has held, or intends to hold, meetings with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council about the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. (AQO 208/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With the Deputy Speaker's and Alastair Ross's permission, I will begin by congratulating Rory McIlroy on his fantastic achievement in the US Open golf championship.

This is the second year in a row that one of our local golfers has succeeded. It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge that today on behalf of the House.

Since taking up office last month, I have not yet had the opportunity to meet the Commonwealth Games Council to discuss the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

I can confirm that engagements and discussions are ongoing. I have not received an invitation from the council as yet, but I am keen to meet it to discuss the Commonwealth Games or any other issue.

Mr Ross: On this side of the House, we too congratulate Rory McIlroy. Indeed, we conveyed our congratulations last week.

Does the Minister agree that it is important that we get as many teams as possible from Northern Ireland to compete in the Glasgow games? Will she ensure that the governing bodies of each sport, Sport NI and the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council are appropriately funded so that we can build on the successes of Delhi?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I concur with the Member's sentiments. It is important that the successes achieved in Delhi be our benchmark, and they are in my Sport Matters strategy. It is not easy for any athlete to compete under the pressure of bringing medals back home. The target that was set for Delhi was five and that was exceeded. The same target is set for the Commonwealth Games in 2014.

The Member is right: support and resources must come from the sporting bodies to ensure that we give our athletes every possible opportunity to achieve success.

Mr A Maskey: It is an opportune time to congratulate athletes and to look forward to the next games, when, no doubt, the boxing fraternity here will excel again and achieve more medals than all the other sports put together. However, I do not mean to be ungracious about anyone else's success.

Can the Minister give us any further information on whether discussions are under way between Sport NI and the Commonwealth Games Council?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for that question, and fair play to him for getting the boxing in. You are on record. Well done, Alex.

As I said to Alastair Ross, discussions are under way and will continue. They will take on a new focus as the time grows near. In the Sport Matters strategy, there are two targets for Commonwealth Games, including the number of medals to be won in Glasgow. Sport NI, along with the sporting organisations, needs to ensure that every opportunity and all support is made available to all the athletes. I believe that the discussions are going fairly well. It is expected that any revision of the strategy would have to be concluded and any views from those bodies taken on board, I would say, by October of this year, in preparation for the games.

Mrs McKeivitt: Can the Minister confirm whether discussions have taken place with other nations to utilise Northern Ireland's training facilities in preparation for the Commonwealth Games in 2014?

Ms Ní Chuilín: To be honest, I am not aware of that in relation to the Commonwealth Games. I am sure that the Member knows that intense discussions are ongoing, led by Sport NI, to attract other countries to come here for their pre-games training for the Olympics. I will obtain that information for the Commonwealth Games and send it to the Member.

DCAL: Regional Language Strategy

3. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will bring forward an indigenous or regional strategy rather than an Irish language strategy. (AQO 209/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is my intention to prepare separate strategies for the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. That reflects the wording of the St Andrews Agreement and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 and the different needs and stages of development of each language.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the St Andrews Agreement called for a regional minority language strategy and not solely an Irish language strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am clear as to what the St Andrews Agreement means. It is also provided for in the agreement that I can take the strategies separately, and that is what I intend to do. I have had some discussions with some of the stakeholders, but not with all of them. Discussions and consultations with the

stakeholders will intensify over the summer. I met some stakeholders in Derry on Saturday who are affiliated the Apprentice Boys. Their emphasis was not solely on language but on heritage and culture. However, it is within my gift to take forward separate strategies, and that is what I intend to do.

Ms Ruane: Will the Minister provide information on what previous consultation was undertaken by the Department in the North on Acht na Gaeilge?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has undertaken two formal public consultations and an equality impact assessment on proposals for Irish language legislation. The first, which sought views on legislative approaches, took place in December 2006 and lasted until March 2007; the second, which was from March 2007, sought views on possible draft clauses. I intend to seek Executive agreement to a further public consultation about renewed proposals for legislation.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí a thug sí go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cad iad na príomh-eilimintí a cheapann sí a ba chóir a bheith mar chuid de Acht Gaeilge.

What key elements does the Minister consider should be part of an Irish language Act?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question and his ongoing commitment to Acht na Gaeilge and the Irish language strategy. I have many ideas about what key elements the legislation should contain; however, I think it appropriate that I wait for the consultation before sharing them. Nevertheless, the Member will know, as I told the Committee and repeated in public, that a rights-based approach to legislation is the best, and only, way forward.

Mr Allister: No later than this morning, during the corporation tax debate, the Minister's colleague Mr Flanagan regaled the House with the benefits of the English language as an attraction for inward investment. Why, therefore, does the Minister want to waste valuable resources on promoting a language that will disadvantage young people in seeking employment in these hard economic times, instead of better equipping them to be more proficient in English?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no comment on what the Member alleges my colleague to have said. That is his opinion. There is plenty of documentation that having more than one language helps people, constituencies and communities with their economic development. I suspect that economic development and well-being are not really what the Member is hinting at. I hope that that has answered whatever sort of question he had.

Border Areas: Culture and Sport

4. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action she is taking to promote cultural and sporting activities in border areas. (AQO 210/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. My Department actively promotes cultural and sporting activities in the border areas as it does in all areas of the North of Ireland. There are many activities across my Department's areas of responsibility, and I want to give him a few examples.

Northern Ireland Screen funds and works closely with three creative learning centres in Crossnacreevy and Armagh, as well as one in the Member's constituency in Derry. Waterways Ireland manages the Erne navigation and the Shannon-Erne waterway and is preparing plans for the extension of the navigation from Upper Lough Erne to Clones in County Monaghan. Moreover, Sport NI, which has invested more than £11 million over the past three years in border district council areas, is also involved in cross-border initiatives to promote sporting activity on an all-island basis.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that Derry City Football Club plays in the League of Ireland and is a cross-border team in that regard, is the Minister considering funding the Brandywell stadium?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not know whether the Member is aware that I visited the Brandywell stadium on Saturday. I have to say that there was a hard sell. To be frank, the conditions in the Brandywell stadium are not befitting of the team. I am aware that it is managed by Derry City Council, and, through Derry City Council and the citizens of Derry, we need to pool our efforts to do what we can to promote better use of the Brandywell. That will happen only when there is a fit-for-purpose facility.

2.15 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a cuid freagraí. I congratulate the Minister. I know that she visited the Brandywell on Saturday. Indeed, she took time out to meet Eamon Zayed, a Derry City footballer who was the subject of racist abuse, and I thank her for taking the initiative. In relation to sporting activities in and around Derry and other places, could the Minister give us some outline of what her plans are in relation to angling, particularly on an all-island basis?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. To put it on the record again, the racist abuse that the player received will have no support from anybody in this House.

I suspect that my colleague's senior colleague Mr McGuinness may have prompted him to ask his question about fisheries and angling. There are a number of fisheries and waterways attached to my Department. There are more than 60 fisheries available to the public on purchase of a licence and permit. My Department has distributed around £5 million in Peace II funding to develop water-based tourism in the sector over the past 10 years and has generated a great deal of angling and tourism around the border, particularly around the lower ends of Donegal. My fisheries officers maintain good links with their counterparts in the South, particularly in relation to lower and upper Lough Erne.

Mr Nesbitt: If the Minister agrees that participation in grass roots sporting activities qualifies as preventative spending in health terms, what are her plans for cross-cutting initiatives with the Health Minister?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I welcome that question. As recently as this lunchtime, myself and the Health Minister met to discuss, first, using our Departments to promote better health and well-being, which was an issue raised in a legacy report from a previous Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, and, secondly, joining up the Departments more through sports and the arts, particularly for better health promotion on suicide prevention and mental health, while also looking at physical health. We are looking at initiatives and events that we can use across different age sectors, because we are acutely aware that what may be OK for young boys may not be so for older people.

I think that the Member is probably hinting at the fact that where joined-up government can work together to take a collaborative approach to support those who are particularly vulnerable, that is what we need to do. If those are the Member's sentiments, I fully welcome them.

Ulster-Scots and Orange Cultural Groups

5. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the funding allocated by her Department to Ulster-Scots and Orange cultural groups for events during the current year. (AQO 211/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: During 2011, the Ulster-Scots Agency allocated the following funding to Ulster-Scots groups: £478,000 for music and dance tuition; £145,000 for festivals; £72,000 for summer schools; £29,000 for partnership funding; and £31,000 for other eligible projects. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has also allocated £450,000 to the community festival fund, which is administered by local councils on a match funding basis. Some of this funding has been provided to the Ulster-Scots and Orange cultural groups, and it is likely that those groups will receive funding again this year. The Arts Council has also made awards of £54,000 to the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association and £25,000 to the Ulster-Scots community network in this financial year.

Following a competitive process, the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland has been identified as one of two suitable organisations to work with DCAL to develop proposals to implement the objectives of the cultural awareness strategy, whose objectives are to build understanding of cultural traditions in the North and contribute to a shared and better future. Work on that, on a three-year basis, is expected to start in July. NI Screen administers the Ulster-Scots broadcast fund, and, since April, it has allocated awards to five projects totalling almost £500,000 out of a budget of almost £1 million.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has outlined a package of measures, all of which have, obviously, been carried out in the past year or several years. She must understand the low esteem in which she is held because of recent decisions that she has taken in her Department. Does she think that she will be able to put aside the baggage of the past and the violence and all that went with it, which, by her own admission, she was involved in, and try

to administer departmental funds and resources impartially for the greater good of all the people of Northern Ireland for the future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Tá. Yes.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. She made reference to pipe bands. Taking into consideration the importance of the marching bands and the Ulster-Scots and Orange cultural groups, following the study done by her Department into marching bands, what investment does she intend to make, given the opportunities for development that were outlined in that study?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I have not had the opportunity to read the results of that study, but I appreciate the culture, the background and the community that some of those bands are involved in. In fact, they are part of the community.

I intend to meet some of the leaders of the different band associations to work through some of the issues. Once I have read the study, if the Member has any further questions or needs any further detail, he can come to my Department. The door is always open.

Ms Lo: The Minister mentioned the cultural awareness strategy. Does the strategy include ethnic minority cultures?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not particularly relevant to the substantive question, but the Minister may wish to answer.

Ms Ní Chuilín: To be quite honest, there is nothing specific about ethnic minorities in the strategy. There are cultural awareness activities in the strategy, but I want to try to work, in the first instance, with Belfast City Council, particularly given the work that it has done on some of the mayor's events and the cultural awareness week. I want to look at some of the programmes that are there to make sure that they are inclusive, because the last thing that I want is for people to be looking in from outside and feel excluded.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This is my first opportunity to wish the Minister all the best in her new post. How are decisions made on the festivals that are successful in securing funding from the community festivals fund?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Decisions are made primarily by local government. The Member has not been involved in local government for some time, but that is where the decisions are taken and where the money is distributed. I see the value in that, because elected representatives have worked for and represented communities and have fought particularly hard for this fund over the years. So, it is important that local government still has that involvement.

However, I am aware that some groups did not receive funding. I am not encouraging them to short-circuit their local council, but if there are particular areas or issues that those groups feel their councils did not take into consideration, they need to write in, in the first instance, and let my Department know.

Creative Industries Innovation Fund

6. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the priorities within the £4 million budget of the creative industries innovation fund and how she will ensure that the budget is allocated equitably. (AQO 212/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The creative industries are recognised locally and internationally for their potential job and wealth creation. They also stimulate wider innovation and expert focus growth and can, therefore, make a contribution to rebuilding and rebalancing the economy. Funding secured by my Department will provide support for creative businesses as well as sectoral initiatives to harness the potential of creative skills and strengths across the North.

By supporting innovation, we can help create the content, products, services and experiences that are capable of competing in global markets. Priorities will focus on export activity; cross-sectoral collaborations; high-growth subsectors, such as digital content; and harnessing the innovation and entrepreneurial potential in the culture, arts and leisure base. Funding to businesses will be on a competitive basis, but my Department and other agencies will promote and encourage applications from across the North.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline how she intends the creative industries innovation fund to work with the rural development programme to ensure that creative industries in rural areas are considered?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. I am acutely aware that 52% of that

fund comes from Belfast. It is not a fund that needs to be spread across the North because it is there; it has to respond to initiatives that are economic in their base. I will endeavour to liaise with my colleague on the rural development fund, because I do not want further gaps to be created between urban and rural. People living in rural areas should have the same opportunities as people living in the city. So, I will endeavour to take that on board.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's response. I think we all recognise the importance of the creative industries in a modern society and the potential for job creation. Will the Minister outline to the House what her Department is doing to ensure that there is a good spread of the creative industries outside the greater Belfast area?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Apart from the answer that I have just given, I am aware of the creativity in the Member's constituency in Derry, which I witnessed first-hand on Saturday. I am actually surprised to go through Question Time with no one asking me about funding for Derry City of Culture. Here is an opportunity to use creative industries to export and import and to support entrepreneurial and business growth. I will endeavour to ask my officials to compare with my colleague, particularly around the urban and rural gaps.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister have a formal strategy for developing the creative industries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do have a formal strategy. I have about two pages of an answer here, but, in short, I do. I also want to make sure that people are aware of any development or any potential to harness innovation for any of the sectors. I intend to try — maybe, if it is useful — to bring forward a synopsis of that strategy and forward it to all Members, so that everyone has the same information at the same time.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland: Balmoral Avenue

7. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the sale of the former Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) site at Balmoral Avenue, Belfast. (AQO 213/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The site at Balmoral Avenue was vacated in January 2011 and is now surplus to requirements. As there was no sustainable interest from other parts of the public sector in acquiring the premises, my Department has obtained outline planning permission for the site to achieve the most favourable return from sale. The site was placed on the open market from 8 April 2011. The sale, which is being managed by a local agent, has been advertised in several local property publications and websites. There has been interest from a number of parties who have viewed the premises, and we anticipate that my Department will receive a reasonable offer or number of offers shortly.

Mr Gardiner: What steps has the Minister taken to help implement the Bain report, which, by relocating government jobs out of Belfast, would free up government buildings in Belfast for sale, rental and other solutions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the last four weeks, I have opened the new PRONI building. Unfortunately for the Member, that is in east Belfast. In relation to the Bain report, I have to be honest and say that I am not aware, but I will find out and write to the Member in due course.

Education

Down High School

1. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's plans for a newbuild for Down High School, Downpatrick. (AQO 221/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. A capital scheme for the extension and refurbishment of Down High School was announced on 21 March 2001 by the then Minister, Martin McGuinness. The scheme formed part of a public-private partnership (PPP) cluster, which also included Tor Bank special school and Lagan College.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) subsequently withdrew the school from the PPP cluster with a view to providing a new school on a greenfield site.

2.30 pm

The SEELB has since been involved in a protracted search for a suitable site. Having obtained planning permission in December

2009, the board submitted a revised economic appraisal to the Department in January 2010, which is currently with the Department's technical advisers. The proposed major capital scheme for Down High School is not in the Department's investment delivery plan, but it is one of a large number of schemes that are at an early stage of planning.

Over the next four years, my Department is faced with limited capital funding, which will impact on its ability to deliver new school building projects. I am looking closely at how to make best use of the capital funds to address the most pressing needs and maximise educational benefits for children and young people. That work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months. In the autumn, when I have considered the options available to me, I wish to be in a position to make a statement on the way forward to the Assembly. As a result of the Budget, I will not be able to bring forward all the projects that are currently planned or in the early stages of planning. That is a difficult position for any Minister, but the capital funds available to me simply will not build the number of newbuilds that schools, quite rightly, seek at this time.

Mr Wells: That is extremely disappointing news from the Minister, because the project has been ongoing for over 10 years. At present, the very successful Down High School finds itself in extremely cramped conditions, with many Portakabins being used as classrooms and a building that costs a small fortune to keep in an adequate state of repair. The school pulled itself up by its bootstraps and successfully attracted students from Down district and further afield. Will the Minister indicate to the Assembly that, when it comes to revising the capital list, Down High School can be confident that it is, at least, well up towards the top of that list?

Mr O'Dowd: It would not be reasonable for me, as Minister, ahead of an announcement, to indicate anything about an individual school's application. I would like to be able to tell the Member that School A, B or C will go ahead, but I have to be responsible for the budget that I have been allocated. I have to ensure that the projects brought forward in this and other financial years are a priority, that they will meet the needs of the educational framework into and beyond the coming decades and that they are sustainable. Each school will be judged on its merits and proposals. I want to be in a position

to make a substantive statement on the matter to the Assembly in the early autumn.

Mrs McKeivitt: What discussions has the Minister had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel about the £270 million backlog in the school maintenance programme?

Mr O'Dowd: During the recent monitoring round, we made bids for further funds to deal with the maintenance backlog in the school estate. When I spoke to the Finance Minister at the Executive, I told him that I wished to hold a series of meetings with him to discuss the entire education budget. It is clear, however, that, as Education Minister, I will have difficult decisions to make in future. I am prepared to make those decisions. I cannot simply go to the Executive, put my hand out and ask other Departments to divvy up moneys if I am not prepared to make the difficult decisions required in education. That includes the restructuring of education services and how those are delivered in the twenty-first century.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister confirm the latest situation with the newbuilds for Lurgan College and Portadown College? What is the timescale for that action?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is a little further afield from the original question. It is up to the Minister whether he wishes to answer.

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the specific information in front of me. I understand that the Member has submitted a question for written answer. I asked for further information on that matter today. Those projects fall into the same category as those that Mr Wells spoke about and any other projects mentioned by Members. They await my deliberations on a capital budget and on how we move forward with capital building.

Schools: 'Every School a Good School'

2. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Education to outline the effectiveness of his Department's 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement' and what plans he has to develop this policy in the future. (AQO 222/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: 'Every School a Good School' has been very effective in raising standards. In 2006, some 53% of school leavers achieved at least five good GCSEs, including maths, English and, for those in Irish-medium settings, Gaelic. In 2010, the figure improved, with an increase

to 59%, which equates to almost 3,000 more young people achieving those results. In the past two years, the inspectorate evaluated provision as either outstanding or very good in 143 schools. Last week, at a reception to celebrate those schools, I was delighted to be a host and to see members of the education family and the Education Committee.

Ensuring that schools are supported in addressing the areas for improvement identified by the Education and Training Inspectorate is a central element of Every School a Good School. Most settings improved between initial and follow-up inspections by at least one performance level, including schools placed in the formal intervention process that had been evaluated as inadequate or unsatisfactory. Since 2009, 28 schools have entered the formal intervention process and eight schools have successfully exited it. However, we cannot be complacent. We remain average by OECD standards, and too many young people are leaving school with poor literacy and numeracy skills. I will continue to implement the school improvement policy and the new literacy and numeracy strategy to ensure that all our young people fulfil their potential.

Mr Molloy: I congratulate the Department and the Minister on their success so far. What effect will budget restrictions have on the Every School a Good School programme in future?

Mr O'Dowd: Dealing with a heavily depleted budget clearly leads to concerns that it will have an effect on the educational outcomes of young people who are going through the schooling system. My predecessor and I have urged those in charge of budget lines throughout the education system — there are over 1,200 budget lines in education — to prioritise front line education services. I am meeting the education and library boards to go through their budget allocations and to discuss how we can ensure that budgets are used to maximum effect, not only to sustain our education system but to improve educational outcomes for the young people involved.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the House will be very concerned to hear the Minister's assertion that the cutbacks will impact on every aspect of the education sector. Will the Minister assure the House that the now inevitable impact on children — children will pay for the cutbacks — will be monitored closely? In addition, will

he tell us specifically how he will ensure that the quality of every child's education and the right that every child in this region has to an education will not be undermined in any way by the proposed cutbacks?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. Many of the responsibilities relating to that question and the comments rest with me, as Minister of Education. I must ensure that the constrained financial circumstances in which we are working do not affect front line services. However, I do not admit that that is inevitable. I have to make decisions, as does the House, on how to plan and distribute education services. We are dealing with an outdated education management model. The five education and library boards and the several other bodies that manage education are no longer an effective or efficient way to deliver education. So, the public would certainly expect us to ensure that, before going anywhere near classrooms to seek savings, we modernise service delivery and squeeze every penny that we can out of bureaucracy. That is the way to ensure that our limited funds achieve the maximum educational outcomes for young people.

Integrated Education

3. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of integrated education. (AQO 223/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I take my statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education very seriously. The integrated sector continues to grow, with over 20,000 pupils attending 43 primary and 20 post-primary integrated schools here. My Department will continue to respond to parental demand for any and all education sectors, where proposals are robust, provide value for money and meet specified criteria.

My Department is exploring other means of sharing and integrating, and opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration for young people at Key Stage 4 and post-16 are presented through the entitlement framework. Members will also be aware of the project being developed in Omagh for a shared education campus, where post-primary schools can relocate to a single site. Each one will retain its own ethos but develop shared facilities and teaching expertise in the best interests of the people of Omagh and surrounding areas.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he plan to use co-operation between schools on the delivery of curriculum entitlement and on achieving a sufficiently wide subject range as a means of achieving greater and more effective cross-faith integration? In addition, what stage has he reached in his discussions with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the education and library boards on the matter?

Mr O'Dowd: Clearly, one of the ways forward for integration and the sharing of services is for schools to work together. You will note that, through area learning communities, there is greater sharing of services and resources and sharing with pupils moving back and forth between schools. That is an effective and realistic way of moving forward in respect of shared futures.

I am not one for glossy documents, consultants' reports, commissioners' reports and commissions; I want to see practice and reality on the ground. When I visit schools, particularly in the post-primary sector, I witness the sharing of resources and services across the sector. That can improve. Although I have had individual discussions with CCMS and the boards about how we move that forward, I would welcome further discussions between all the education providers on sharing services. Even if we were flush with money, there is a duty on all our education providers to start sharing services and to allow our young people to meet and exchange with one another in the school setting.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be aware that my party leader called for consideration to be given to a single education system. Has his Department given any consideration to that option, and will he inform the House of the outcome?

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of Mr Robinson's speech; there was much debate about it. However, no formal proposals have come across my desk. We, as politicians, are elected to make decisions. The days of setting up commissions and bodies to examine the work that we should be doing are over. The difficult decisions rest with us. If we are serious about shared futures and shared societies, I suggest that measured words and comments from politicians would also assist in that regard.

Mr Dickson: Minister, do you agree that parental choice is paramount when it comes to choosing

the education for one's children and that integrated education and schools deliver an excellent model of education for this community?

Mr O'Dowd: I agree with your comments about parental choice and integrated education. The Department can act only if there is sufficient parental demand in an area to expand or develop a new school provision in any sector. My predecessors, Martin McGuinness and Caitríona Ruane, worked favourably with the integrated sector. I intend to continue that relationship. We have several education sectors, all of which provide excellent education services to the communities and are based on parental demand.

Gaelscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon

4. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposals for Gaelscoil Aodha Rua in Dungannon. (AQO 224/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat. I am pleased to tell you that, on 15 June 2011, I conditionally approved the development proposal to establish a new grant-aided Irish-medium primary school in Dungannon, which will be known as Gaelscoil Aodha Rua. The school will open in September 2011, provided it meets the minimum enrolment threshold for a rural primary school in the Irish-medium sector. It must achieve the minimum viability intake of 12 pupils in year one. In addition, the Department must be satisfied that the site and premises comply with health and safety requirements, and the school must provide the Department with written confirmation that it will comply fully with all statutory conditions in relation to the operation and management of a grant-aided school.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for his answer. My supplementary question was around the minimum requirements. I understand that Aodha Rua has 14 children enrolled already for primary one — rang a haon — which is very much to be welcomed. Will the Minister make it his business to visit the new school during its first year in operation to see for himself the benefit that it will bring not just to children from Dungannon but to the south Tyrone community at large?

2.45 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the news that the school has met the minimum enrolment figure for a new Gaelscoil in a rural area. I come from a

rural background, and good manners dictate that I have to accept that invite.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister consider the fact that the current legislation regarding the Department's statutory duty to promote and facilitate Irish-medium and integrated education will be looked at? Other education sectors feel that there is not a level playing field in the allocation of capital projects or the way in which they are dealt with in respect of other issues emanating from his Department.

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to revisit either piece of legislation, which, the Member will be aware, flows from the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. I assure the Member that all decisions relating to the provision of grant aid to any sector are open and transparent and are open to examination by members of the public. They are set against clear published criteria and against the legislation, which is on the legislative books. Therefore, all those decisions can be examined. Like any Minister or Department, we are open to criticism for our decisions, but, as long as I am satisfied that any decision of mine is made against clear criteria, I will stand by that decision.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Ach an dtig liom a fhiafraí den Aire cur ina luí orainn na céimeanna atá á nglacadh aige le breis maoinithe a thabhairt don bhunscolaíocht, don mheánscolaíocht agus don ardscolaíocht?

What measures has the Minister taken to increase and enhance the amount of money that his Department has spent on nursery, primary and secondary school education? That question relates to Irish-language education.

Mr O'Dowd: Patsy, my Irish is not great, but I did pick up from your question that you were referring to the Irish-medium sector. Go raibh maith agat, Patsy. In respect of the previous answer to the Chair of the Education Committee, each proposal will have to be looked at on its own merits. We can look back on the past number of years with pride that the Irish-language community has been able to develop its Irish-medium education sector, as it rightly should, because parents want their children to be taught through the medium of Irish. There is a growing sector out there that deserves to be supported, and there is a legislative basis on which it will be supported. My Department has

policies on which it will be supported, and each development proposal that is forwarded to my office will be judged against that legislation and those policies.

DE: Budget 2011-15

5. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education how he plans to meet his Department's budgetary shortfall during the 2011-15 period. (AQO 225/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The budget outcome for education for 2011-15 has presented major challenges. A savings delivery plan has been developed to realise resource savings over the four-year Budget period of £100 million, £101 million, £187 million, £229 million and £306 million in the last year to enable the Department to live within its budget. Savings measures seek to protect spend on departmental priorities and bear down on administration and duplication. I will continue to work to alleviate pressures on front line services. I intend to work with my Executive colleagues in the months and years ahead to help to alleviate the pressures on the education budget.

I wish to work with my Executive colleagues in reaching agreement on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), which I believe will ensure greater consistency and efficiency in service delivery. Without it, scarce resources will continue to be spent on unnecessary bureaucracy and will be spread too thinly over existing institutions.

Mr Cree: Has the Minister assessed the number of teachers who will lose their job because of budgetary cuts, or can he give any guarantees on job protection, given that the median age for teachers is only 40 years of age?

Mr O'Dowd: Sorry, I missed the last point of your question.

Mr Cree: Can you give any guarantees on job protection, bearing in mind that the median age for teachers is only 40 years of age?

Mr O'Dowd: Education is presented with a number of difficulties in preparing its budget, including retrieving information for assessment and distribution, especially to elected representatives. I am head of a Department that has over 1,200 budget lines, the majority of which are made up by schools that manage their own budget. Boards of governors will decide

how those budgets are spent and the number of teachers and redundancies.

Quite rightly, boards of governors will come back to me and say that they can work only within the budget that they are set. They are correct. I can work only within the budget that I am set. So, I am not able to give a forecast on forced redundancies at this stage. I hope to return to the subject in September, when all the boards and schools have reported back to the Department. We have a figure to work off for this year, which they will be able to extrapolate over the remaining three years.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Could the Minister outline how the establishment of an Education and Skills Authority could help to deliver savings in the education system?

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority was not originally promoted simply as a saving device. However, it is very important, especially in the current economic climate, that we alleviate the financial pressures on education, as has been the case in other Departments where the review of public administration has either been completed or is proposed to go through. It is important that we modernise our education administration here. I require and am seeking agreement with my Executive colleagues on how we move the ESA programme forward. I understand that some other parties have concerns about how we deal with that. I believe that those concerns can be overcome and that the other parties want to have that matter resolved in the short term because they also recognise the budgetary constraints. The primary focus of ESA has to be on the ability to improve the educational outcomes of young people in our schools, thereby raising the standard of young people who go out into society and play an active role in the community and the economy and who, therefore, are of benefit to our entire society.

Mr T Clarke: In an answer to Leslie Cree, the Minister indicated that he could not give figures. His Department will have figures on schools that are unsustainable in the area. Given that, in budgetary terms, a total of 850 schools are involved, how many schools are in an unsustainable position to the extent that, ultimately, he would consider them for closure?

Mr O'Dowd: I can consider a school for closure only if the governing authority —

CCMS, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta or the education boards — comes forward to me with a development proposal to close the school. However, although I am aware that we have a number of unsustainable schools in our portfolio, I caution Members not to judge unsustainable schools simply on the basis of numbers. There is a sustainable schools policy, and that is what schools should be judged against. I hope that the Member is as enthusiastic about closing schools when it comes to closing a school in his constituency, because that is when —

Mr T Clarke: You close schools, not me.

Mr O'Dowd: If I am correct, the Member is a member of an education board, so he also has a responsibility around closing schools.

A school should be closed only if does not meet the criteria in the sustainable schools policy, if it is not achieving the educational outcomes for the young people in it and if every other measure to raise the standards in the school has been tried and has not succeeded. I will inform the House that several schools in the education portfolio are letting down the young people who attend them. Although several of those schools are receiving assistance from the Department of Education, their education board and the Education and Training Inspectorate, unless there is a major turnaround in those schools in the short term, I believe that there is a responsibility on the governing bodies and me to close those schools.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has depressed us somewhat by talking about the closure of schools and the loss of teaching posts. As we approach the holidays, can he cheer us up by assuring us that information and communication technology (ICT) will remain a priority for his Department? Will he explain how he intends to do that, given that the ICT budget has been savagely cut?

Mr O'Dowd: I encourage the Member to examine the Every School a Good School policy and the sustainable schools policy. I have no doubt that the Member, as a constituency MLA, would not want a school in his constituency that was failing its young people after going through all the measures of support that are available. We cannot allow more children to go through schools that have not reacted in a positive way to the policies and interventions that are available to them to improve educational outcomes. I will

not be shy when it comes to making a hard decision on closing an underperforming school that has not turned the corner.

The Member made comments about ICT. We were fortunate that, over many years, we had a very healthy ICT budget, and we have had major investment in ICT schemes throughout our schools. C2k has been a very successful project, and it still has a substantial budget to carry forward its work. I have asked that all my budget streams be examined to ensure that we get as efficient a response as possible to the money that we spend, and I believe that IT is a good area in which to ensure value for money.

Post-primary Education: Armagh

6. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of relocation opportunities for post-primary education facilities in Armagh city. (AQO 226/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To date, no formal proposals have been submitted to my Department about the matter. However, I am aware that some schools in the city are exploring possible options, including the potential use of land at the St Luke's Hospital site. It is the responsibility of the school managing authorities in the first instance to manage provision in their respective sectors and to bring proposals to the Department to meet local demand. Given the financial constraints, we will have to be creative and innovative when developing solutions to meet the needs of schools. We will have to consider more sharing, co-location and collaboration, and I encourage all those developing proposals to embrace a way of thinking to meet the needs of a modern education system.

Mr Murphy: I thank the Minister for his answer. He rightly refers to the financial constraints that he faces in his budget, particularly on the capital side. Does he agree that, in the context of the constrained financial budget, it is a very welcome prospect for schools to come together with radical proposals that facilitate the sharing of facilities both within sectors and, on occasion, across sectors? Will the Department consider giving support to schools that want to develop such ideas to allow them to bring those ideas to the Department for support?

Mr O'Dowd: In principle, I endorse the proposal that the Member sets out. We have

to encourage our sectors to come together, share resources, share sites and look at ways, even through area planning, to bring schools together under capital build programmes. If schools wish to hold on to their identities under such a programme, that can be achieved through the proposals. However, I am awaiting the publication of the Commission for Catholic Education's post-primary review, which is a piece of work that has taken place across the North and has looked at the post-primary estate in the Catholic sector. I want to be in a position to make a statement in September on the way forward for my capital budget. I want the post-primary review to be published and on my table before I make that statement. However, as Minister, I have a responsibility to move ahead and spend the limited funds available to me, and I do not think that delay will favour anyone.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé go dtí seo. An dtiocfadh liom a fhiafraí de an bhfuil sé sásta leis an soláthar don Ghaelscolaíocht ag leibhéal an mheánoideachais i dtoghcheantar an lúir agus Ard Mhacha nuair a chaitheas páistí taisteal 20 míle ar bhus ó lúir Cinn Trá go hArd Mhaca?

Is the Minister happy with the Irish-medium provision at secondary level in Newry and Armagh, given that some children have to travel 20 miles by bus from Newry to Armagh and given that he specifically said that he would encourage children to attend their local secondary school and not travel such distances?

Mr O'Dowd: I am very happy with the educational outcomes in the Irish-medium sector, especially at Coláiste Chaitríona. It is a shining example of how the English-medium sector and the Irish-medium sector can share resources successfully. It is regrettable, but we are still developing the Irish-medium sector.

For years, we went through the naíscóils. We have now developed a wide area that is covered by bunscoils. The next area that needs to be worked on is the meánscoils. However, we cannot do one without the other. The quality of education that young people receive in their educational establishment must be emphasised and is at the core of Irish-medium education. That is set against a number of factors, whether in the Irish or the English medium. It would be nice for me to stand up and announce a number of meánscoils across the North, but I will not do

that unless I am satisfied that the educational attainment in those schools is going to be of the highest standard. Let us build that gradually and make sure that it is successful.

3.00 pm

Assembly Commission

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 3 and 7 have been withdrawn. Paul Maskey is not in his place to ask question 1.

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the cost to the Assembly of the Attorney General's referral of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill to the Supreme Court. (AQO 236/11-15)

Mr Cree: The time spent on this matter by our in-house lawyers and others is not costed, as it is part of their role to respond to such challenges. Senior and junior counsel were appointed to represent the Assembly's interests, but their fees have not yet been agreed by the Assembly Commission. However, a Supreme Court application fee of £180 was also incurred.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Cree for that answer. Given that the Attorney General withdrew his reference to the Supreme Court of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, will the Attorney General for Northern Ireland pay the Assembly's case costs?

Mr Cree: Prior to consenting to the withdrawal of the reference, the Assembly Commission advised the Attorney General for Northern Ireland that, although the Assembly would be entitled to pursue costs against him, to do so would not be in the public interest. The Assembly Commission, therefore, agreed to bear its own costs in respect of the reference. The Attorney General for Northern Ireland will not, therefore, be asked to pay the Assembly costs. We understand that the Department of Finance and Personnel has adopted a similar position.

Mr Allister: I note the figures that the Member has quoted, but they are at total variance with figures supplied to me in questions for written answer, which suggest that there was a £30,000 bill for potentially defending this matter and an estimated £4,000 bill in respect

of the Attorney General's office. If Ministers are supplying totally different figures, where is the Commission getting its figures from?

Mr Cree: Figures were supplied by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. He was asked to provide an estimate of the cost of the Northern Ireland Attorney General's challenge to the validity of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, and in answer to a question in the Assembly on 3 June, which I think the Member refers to, he estimated that the work undertaken by his Department in defending the reference would cost £30,000. The Minister stressed that that figure was just an estimate that may be revised. As the Assembly Commission is currently negotiating counsel fees in respect of the reference, it would not be in the interest of the public purse to release an estimate at this point.

Parliament Buildings: Car Parking

4. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Assembly Commission why it has not yet extended the lower east car park. (AQO 238/11-15)

11. **Mrs Overend** asked the Assembly Commission what was the outcome of its recent negotiations with the Department of Finance and Personnel in relation to resolving the car parking problem at Parliament Buildings. (AQO 245/11-15)

14. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on increasing car parking facilities in the vicinity of Parliament Buildings. (AQO 248/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4, 11 and 14 together.

The Assembly Commission is very aware of the difficulties currently being experienced with car parking, most notably on plenary days; that is, Mondays and Tuesdays. I can tell Members that car parking is high on the agenda at all Commission meetings that I have attended. Ongoing discussions with Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials recently resulted in an agreement that the Assembly can develop an existing car park adjacent to the lower east car park for use as an overflow facility, particularly on plenary days.

It has also been agreed that minor alterations can be made to the parking layout in the lower

east car park. Together, those proposals will create approximately 50 additional car parking spaces for users of Parliament Buildings.

It is planned that construction work will be carried out during the summer recess and that the spaces will be available in early September. Further to that, agreement has been reached with the Department of Finance and Personnel that Assembly security staff will assume responsibility for managing those car parks and that access to them will be restricted to those who use Parliament Buildings. The issue of car parking has been raised by a number of Members, and it is anticipated that that will significantly improve car parking facilities, particularly on Assembly plenary sitting days.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Commission for that reply. It is unfortunate that the Commission appears to be able only to discuss the matter but never begin to resolve it. I hope that the action being taken will resolve the matter. Does the Commission agree that, in general, parking is getting worse on the estate and that urgent action is required immediately?

Mr P Ramsey: The Assembly Commission has been diligent on the matter. It is not easy when it has to deal with another Department that has overall control of the management of the estate. It took considerable discussions to reach agreement. As I outlined to the Member, he will see significant improvement, with 50 additional car parking spaces being made available in September when staff return after the summer recess.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the movement on the issue. I have no further questions, so long as it is confirmed that there will be extra places in September.

Mrs D Kelly: What plans has the Commission for the maintenance of the Stormont estate over the next 12 months?

Mr P Ramsey: In general terms, the maintenance of the Stormont estate is under the governance of DFP. There is a need for ongoing maintenance, and the Commission will be taking up that issue directly with that Department.

Assembly Committees: IT Facilities

5. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Assembly Commission what plans there are to introduce IT facilities in Committee meeting rooms. (AQO 239/11-15)

Mr Cree: The provision of IT facilities in Committee meeting rooms is the subject of an ongoing cross-directorate piece of work. The aim of the project is to determine the most appropriate means by which to facilitate Committee meetings to embrace modern technology and provide a more efficient service to Committees and their members. To ensure that the IT facilities provided are the most appropriate for the needs of members, the Assembly's Research and Information Service will carry out initial research of technologies employed in other legislatures and local councils, and issue a questionnaire to help determine the attitude of members to the introduction of such facilities and the most appropriate mechanism for delivering the needs of members.

Under consideration will be the choice of hardware to be employed. Options might include, but are not limited to, fixed screens and keyboards in each Committee room, laptops or hand-held tablet-style devices. In determining the most appropriate option, consideration will be given to the preferences expressed by members; the cost, health and safety implications; the effect that the choice of equipment might have on existing recording equipment and any alterations that might be required to it; the security of information contained on the equipment; the training required by members and staff to use the new equipment and software; and the reputational risk to the Assembly and its users. The project is in its initial stages, and a vast number of variables will need to be considered as it progresses. The progress of the project will be periodically reported to the Chairpersons' Liaison Group.

Mrs McKeivitt: What is the status of the planned upgrade to all Assembly IT software?

Mr Cree: The real purpose of the exercise is to cut down the paper packs. In the past financial year, almost nine million sheets of A4 paper were used for printing and photocopying across the Assembly at an approximate cost of £54,500 plus VAT. Although Committees are not the only users, they are one of the biggest. No longer producing Committee information packs will greatly reduce that cost. However, that cost saving can be made only if all members move to paperless Committee meetings.

Assembly: Constituency Offices

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the impact on services to constituents caused by the delay in approving the rental valuations of some new Members' constituency offices. (AQO 240/11-15)

Mr Weir: The desirability of obtaining an independent valuation of constituency office rentals was covered in the 'Financial Support for Members Handbook' in March 2011 and was effective from the start of this new mandate. It arose as a result of a recommendation made by the Review Body on Senior Salaries in its November 2008 report on Members' pay, pensions and allowances, which was adopted by the Assembly Commission in its report to the Assembly on that matter. That requirement reflects the Assembly Commission's desire to ensure that value for money is consistently achieved for rental payments funded from public funds and that such payments are perceived as fair.

The Assembly Commission is aware of a number of issues that have arisen during the implementation of the project. However, the Commission is also mindful that the degree of market analysis and comparison that is required to ensure that the most accurate rental valuations are provided means that professional valuations may take some time to complete.

The Assembly Commission has already met to review the progress that has been made on the exercise to date and will be meeting later today to discuss the matter further. The Assembly Commission wishes to assure the House that it will move to resolve these matters as soon as possible to ensure that all newly appointed Members have access to suitable constituency office properties at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Allister: I take no issue with the fact that there should be independent valuation. But, at the induction of new Members, it was boasted to us that the process would take four or five days; it is now some seven weeks. It is almost as if some people did not know that there was going to be an election and nothing was put in place to deal with it. Apparently, it was some weeks after the election that valuers were appointed; then, they got out on the ground; then, they produced reports —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr Allister: How could the Commission be satisfied or complacent about a system that, patently, is not working and is robbing constituents of the service that they should by now have?

Mr Weir: That is an issue that we will be looking at later today. The valuers can look at a property only when it is identified, first of all, by the Member. Therefore, they would not be in a position to look at new properties on 5 May, for example. The process had to be a competitive process of tendering to ensure that we had consistent valuations in connection with that. I understand the frustrations of the Member, because I suspect that they are shared by others. However, it is important that we get this right to ensure not only that the system offers proper value for money for the taxpayer in the first seven weeks of this Assembly but that it will be robust and stand the test of time over the next four or five years. It is, therefore, important that the proper time is taken to get it correct.

Struck against that must be the balance of ensuring that there is proper provision for constituents. Today, we will be looking at how that can be brought about. The processes have been timely in that regard, and effort has been made to ensure that the cases of new Members who are seeking property are dealt with first. The process is supposed to cover all MLAs, but, principally, the focus has been on new Members.

Mr Dickson: I am a new Member, and I identified a suitable property in my constituency in May. We are now sitting at the end of June, and I have not yet been able to secure appropriate premises because of the delays caused by the valuation process. I am not in a position to deliver an adequate constituency service to my constituents in East Antrim who deserve such a service and have done so since the day and hour I was elected.

Mr Weir: Again, I understand the Member's frustration. As I said, we will be dealing with the issue later today via your Commission member and other Commission members. This is the first time that this has been done. It is important that whatever process is put in place is got right. I appreciate the level of concern and inconvenience that it causes a new Member, but we have got to look at something that will be robust right across the full mandate, rather than something that will simply be there for the first few weeks.

Mr Elliott: I thank the member of the Commission for his response. It is obviously quite a technical issue. How much input did the Commission have in the appointment of the property valuation company? How much is the overall process going to cost and how long is it going to take? How much consideration was given to the property valuer's relationship with each area and his knowledge of the property values in each area throughout Northern Ireland?

3.15 pm

Mr Weir: I will try to take those questions in turn. There was a competitive tendering process and, from a procurement point of view, the best bid was made by the successful surveyor. I believe that the cost is around £12,000 for the overall survey, covering all 108 Members. The surveyor was given, I think, three months, but with the understanding that new MLAs and those who were seeking to renew a lease were given priority. I know that a number of Members, particularly new MLAs, have lodged appeals, so there is a process for that. I suspect that I have forgotten some of the questions. However, the gist of the answer is that we are trying to ensure a professional and correct process.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is the reason why Members should ask one question that they want answered. Question 7 has been withdrawn. Question 8 will be answered by Barry McElduff on behalf of the Commission.

Assembly: European Engagement

8. **Mr Swann** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the development of a European engagement strategy to enhance engagement with the European institutions. (AQO 242/11-15)

Mr McElduff: The Commission is mindful that it does not take the lead role in scrutinising Europe. Everyone knows that Statutory Committees take the lead in scrutinising how Departments and Ministers, first, become aware of European Union legislation, and, secondly, enact that legislation. The Committee for Employment and Learning is a good example, with its recent work on the transposition of the agency workers directive. Committees have a major role to play in challenging what Departments are doing to ensure that available EU funding is channelled through various streams.

The Commission is keenly aware of the lead role of the Committees in this matter and its

role is to ensure that the Committees have the necessary support and resources to carry out that work properly. In carrying out that role, the Commission works very closely with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which takes the lead on European issues. That Committee took forward inquiries on European engagement in the previous mandate and the mandate before that, when it was the Committee of the Centre.

Both the Commission and the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have expressed the view that there might be some merit in appointing a person who would be based in Brussels and would look after the interests of the Assembly there. However, because of the current economic climate, the Commission and the wider Assembly need to be satisfied as to value for money. For now, the preferred way forward is the appointment of an EU scrutiny co-ordinator to be based at Parliament Buildings. One of that person's early tasks will be to put forward options for arrangements for a presence in Brussels. Initial preparation work will begin in the summer and there will be a report to the Commission by the end of the year.

Mr Swann: Is there further detail on how that person will be selected or on who will make the final decision on selection?

Mr McElduff: It is my understanding that the Commission will appoint from within the secretariat. There will be an open trawl. For example, staff within this Building may wish to go forward to become the EU scrutiny co-ordinator. What exactly will that co-ordinator do? The post is currently being graded, and typical Assembly procedures will be followed to make the appointment. On appointment, the officer will co-ordinate the flow of information and expertise to Committees to give them more assistance in scrutinising Ministers and Departments. The co-ordinator will also engage with a wide range of external sources and create linkages from those to the work of Committees.

Mr Dallat: I have very fond memories of one of my early trips to Brussels, which was with Barry McElduff, who created quite a stir. Does he not agree that, in times of economic austerity, we need to have the closest relationship with Europe to ensure that we maximise whatever benefits come from there?

Mr McElduff: I thank the Member for the question. Again, cost is an issue, but so too are the potential benefits. You might have to invest to save in a situation such as this. That is why the Commission is looking at a number of options. It might be worth knowing that, if there were to be a permanent officer in Brussels similar to that of other Parliaments or regional Assemblies, the calculated cost would be in the region of £95,000 to £132,000 annually. Before the Commission or the Assembly would commit to such expenditure, we would want to be clear that we were getting value for money. However, I do take the Member's point that it might be very necessary to spend that money to get a better return and investment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ross Hussey is not in his place, so we will move on to the next question.

North/South Parliamentary Forum

10. **Mr Murphy** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of the North/South Parliamentary Forum. (AQO 244/11-15)

Mr Cree: On 23 June 2011, at a joint meeting of the North/South Parliamentary Forum working groups in the Oireachtas, it was agreed that a further three joint meetings of the two working groups will be convened to take forward the ideas and actions generated by the North/South Parliamentary Forum conference at the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2010. The meetings are planned for the autumn of 2011, and areas for consideration include parliamentary relationships in Europe, European agriculture and rural development reform and the role and arrangements for the North/South Parliamentary Forum. It was further agreed that the report from the Slieve Donard conference will be issued to all members from both legislatures.

Mr Murphy: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Depending on which member of the Commission is answering questions, I almost have to rephrase my words. However, I am sure that you share my frustration at the length of time that it has taken to establish the North/South Parliamentary Forum. That area of work was part of the St Andrews Agreement; it emanates from the Good Friday Agreement some 13 years ago but is yet to be established. Although the work of the conference is welcome,

we have now moved into working groups but have yet —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could we have a question, please?

Mr Murphy: Yes, I am just coming to that. Does the Member think that it reflects badly on this institution that it continues to take such a long time to establish the forum? Will the Commission try to bring some sense of urgency to the working groups to get a proposition so that we can actually establish the forum?

Mr Cree: I understand the Member's frustration. I was at the Slieve Donard conference last year. Last week's meeting was very fruitful. There was a good atmosphere, and genuine efforts were made to take the matter forward. That will happen in the autumn.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has already been dealt with, so we will move on.

Assembly Committees: Mobile Phones and iPads

12. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Assembly Commission what steps are being taken to facilitate the use of iPads and mobile phones in Committee meeting rooms. (AQO 246/11-15)

Mr Cree: The use of laptops and mobile phones in Committee meeting rooms has been an ongoing issue for some time. As Members will be aware, the use of mobile phones creates particular difficulties because the signals transmitted and received by such devices interfere with audio recordings. Every effort has been made to attempt to address the issue, from altering the sound levels and adjusting the equipment to the use of alternative microphones. However, it has not been possible to resolve the issue. Westminster now has equipment that can almost eliminate the effect of the signals transmitted and received by mobile phones. However, that has been at a high financial cost. It would also involve considerable alteration to Committee rooms.

On the issue of iPads, as part of an ongoing project across the Assembly secretariat, consideration is being given to the introduction of IT facilities in Committee meeting rooms as an alternative to Committee packs. As part of that project, consideration will be given to a hand-held, tablet-style device similar to the iPad. The iPad is just one of the ever-increasing range

of such devices available. Indeed, last evening, I had sight of my granddaughter playing with a BlackBerry device called a “play board” or something — fantastic technology. In deciding on the most appropriate hardware to be used by Committee members as a result of the project, the option of an iPad or similar tablet computer will be considered.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the member of the Commission for his answer. He stole part of my supplementary question by referring to what happens at Westminster. Surely the Commission accepts that something needs to be done to ensure that mobile phones do not interfere with equipment. Some MLAs consistently choose to break the rules by using their mobile phones in Committee rooms and, indeed, the House. Will the Commission at least give an assurance that it will seriously consider purchasing equipment to eradicate any interference?

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, based on the Westminster model, the estimated cost of upgrading the audio facilities here is between £80,000 and £90,000 for each Committee room. It is important to note that that is only an indicative cost, as any new system must be bespoke to the room in question, which is likely to result in an additional cost. So the cost is high. However, Westminster has a working solution, and the Commission will look further at that model.

Mr Murphy: Does the member of the Assembly Commission agree that, in addition to the interference that mobile phones and iPads cause, the content of some messages shown on them can be disturbing and offensive? Perhaps the Member who asked the original question might reflect on that.

Mr Cree: It is certainly an issue. In fact, as I said in an earlier answer, any sort of progress in that area must have the full support of Committee members. If they are not prepared to use the technology or have reasons for preferring paper, the whole project will be an absolute waste of time. It is a difficult issue. Circulars will be sent to Committee members asking for their opinions, and we will work on that basis.

Ms Lo: With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask a question that is slightly off the track. I would like to point out that the sound system in the Senate is still very poor.

The Environment Committee meets there every Thursday. Any other Committee members here will probably agree with me. We would like the system to be improved. If that does not happen, we might have to think about moving from the Senate to another room for our Committee meetings.

Mr Cree: I take your point. The difficulty with the Senate is that it is the oldest room here. It is in a similar condition to when it was built in the 1930s, and it has a considerable history. The Senate is a large room and is difficult to handle. We believe that the Westminster system could work in that room and would not be obtrusive. As I said to Mr Murphy, we will certainly review the situation to see what can be done. It is probably the biggest room outside of this one and has its own particular problems.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Basil McCrea is not in his place for question 13. Question 14 has already been dealt with. That is the end of questions to the Assembly Commission.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Justice

Prisoner Release: George Damien MacFerran

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice from Paul Givan of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Justice.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what measures are being taken to investigate the erroneous release of George Damien MacFerran from HMP Maghaberry and to ensure that a fit-for-purpose system is in place to prevent further such incidents occurring.

3.30 pm

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I regret to advise the House that George Damien MacFerran was released in error by the general office of Maghaberry prison on Friday 24 June 2011. The matter came to light on Monday 27 June, and Mr MacFerran was returned to Maghaberry prison by police officers at approximately 6.00 pm yesterday.

Mr MacFerran was released 47 days before his due release date. I take the matter very seriously, and I am clear that an immediate and thorough investigation is required into the circumstances that led to that erroneous release. Terms of reference for that investigation have been issued and a senior prison governor, who reports directly to Prison Service headquarters, has been appointed to lead the investigation. Although I do not wish to pre-empt the outcome of the investigation, as far as I am aware, the circumstances of this erroneous release are quite different from those of the three prisoners who were released in error last year. At this stage, there are no indications that the early release occurred as the result of a systems error.

I do not underestimate the seriousness of the incident and the impact that it will have on public confidence in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. It serves to highlight the need for fundamental end-to-end reform of the Prison Service, which is to be taken forward through the strategic efficiency and effectiveness

programme that I launched earlier today. There is a pressing need to ensure that Prison Service personnel get the basics right and get them right consistently. Keeping prisoners in custody until their due release dates is a fundamental part of the role of the Prison Service, and I am, therefore, committed to doing everything that I can to ensure that real improvements are made in that area of work.

Mr Givan: Today, the director general of the Prison Service said that the vision of the Prison Service would be based on getting back to basics, and I am sure that the Minister would agree that there is nothing as basic as ensuring that those who are supposed to be in prison stay in prison. So that public confidence is not continually undermined, incidents like this cannot happen again, and I am sure that the Minister would agree also with that. Will the investigation also examine the senior managers who are responsible for putting the systems in place? Surely any system must have a triple-lock mechanism, whereby if a human error is made — I am not saying that that happened in this instance — it is detected and something like this does not happen again. Will the investigation include senior management?

Mr Ford: When I made it clear that a senior prison governor, who is independent of the Maghaberry arrangements, was appointed to investigate, it was with the intention of ensuring that every conceivable line was followed through properly. The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice highlighted the issue of the number of locks that we may put into the system, and that is clearly valid. However, we also need to ensure that the locks are applied properly and correctly, and that errors are not made in the way that appears to have happened on this occasion.

I will not pre-empt the outcome of the investigation further. I will inform the House and the Committee in particular of the outcome of that investigation when it is achieved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes this item of business. I ask the Members to take their ease for a few moments.

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

Ministerial Statement

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the outcome of the statutory inquiry into the oral medicine service at the Royal Victoria Hospital's dental hospital and two issues concerning the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, namely the concerns about the pay awards for some directors of the Belfast Trust and the contractual arrangements for the security of the Belvoir Park site.

On 7 February 2011, the previous Health Minister announced in the Assembly that an independent inquiry would be established on matters concerning the Belfast Trust and the recall of a number of patients who had received treatment at the regional oral medicine service based at the Belfast dental hospital. On Friday 24 June, I received a dental inquiry report. I want to take the opportunity to thank Brian Fee QC and his team for the comprehensive report that they provided to me. By way of a summary for MLA colleagues and the public, the inquiry's terms of reference were, broadly, to evaluate the quality of care provided to all those patients who were recalled for review; to evaluate the effectiveness of communications between and within the Royal dental hospital, health and social care organisations, the Department, patients and the general public; and to make recommendations for improvements to quality and communications.

At the outset, I want to highlight to the public that the trust has assured me that it is managing services at the dental hospital to ensure patient safety and the best possible quality of services. The Department, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) as commissioner and the trust are acting together to ensure that that is secured and maintained. I hope that the Assembly will understand that it is essential that we ensure that nothing is said here that prejudices the proper process of

investigations by the trust and/or by regulators. I ask Members to hold back from asking any questions that address issues about any individual concerned. I hope that you will agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it will be in order if I refrain from answering any such questions. The report makes 45 recommendations. I will give them all full and detailed consideration. Those recommendations include some that relate to the Belfast Trust, some relating to the entire health and social care service, as well as issues to be addressed by my Department.

Patient safety is my first priority. The report's findings show that patients have been let down. There were serious deficiencies in the quality of care that was provided to patients, which may have impacted adversely on the health of some. I want to apologise to people who were affected for the serious failings in the care that they received through the oral medicine services that were provided by the dental hospital and the Belfast Trust. In some cases, there have been failures, material delays and difficulties in accessing appropriate treatment. I recognise that not only has that impacted adversely on timely access to treatment for individuals, but it has caused considerable anxiety and distress to patients and their families. I am truly concerned for those patients and their families. The system has let them down. I intend to do all that I can to ensure that those failings are rectified.

Before I go into the detail of the report, I want to make a general comment to reassure the public. The health and social care service treats hundreds of thousands of patients every year, and, in the vast majority of cases, to a very high standard. However, we know that sometimes — thankfully, only in a small proportion of cases — things go wrong. When an incident such as that happens, the first priority has to be the patient involved. Then, the service needs to look at what happened, why it happened, and how a further incident can be prevented from happening again. It is only by adopting such an approach and by sharing learning that a safer service can be achieved and we can maintain the trust and confidence of the public, who place their care in our hands.

The report's findings are serious and make sober reading. As my predecessor explained to the Assembly last February, in November 2009, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust became aware that six people who had been referred for surgery following a diagnosis of oral

cancer could potentially have been referred at an earlier stage of their illness. In December 2009, the Belfast Trust took action to appoint a case investigator and to review and carry out a look-back exercise into the issue; a complex process, which involved looking at some 3,000 clinical records and, in all, took nearly 11 months to complete. The inquiry has confirmed that the vast majority of the 3,000 patients who were considered had been appropriately managed and treated. The issue that emerged in February 2011 was that 18 people were identified for whom major concerns existed about their quality of care. Following further investigations, it was confirmed that there were, in fact, major concerns in respect of 22 people.

All those people were being actively managed by specialists in the Health Service at the time that their concerns were identified. Fifteen cancer patients were identified, four of whom died: three from oral cancer and one from other causes. I repeat my predecessor's expression of sympathy to the families of those patients on the loss of their loved ones.

I want to give the Assembly a summary of some of the most important aspects of the inquiry's findings. The inquiry found that there was some cause for concern about the oral medicine service two to three years before the problem was reported in December 2009. The inquiry also concluded that, in December 2009, the trust should have reported a serious adverse incident (SAI) as required under departmental guidance when a look-back review is initiated. The Department and the trust fully accept that an SAI should have been reported earlier than was the case. The arrangements for the reporting of an SAI were revised from May 2010, when the HSCB took on additional responsibilities. Thus, several opportunities were missed that might have drawn higher-level attention to the issue. However, the trust did not explain what it was doing or provide evidence of the full range of concerns to the Department, the HSCB or the Public Health Authority (PHA) at any stage between December 2009 and December 2010.

On 25 February 2010, the trust received the report of the case investigator, which recommended more direct action to address concerns for patient safety. However, at a meeting attended by the case investigator, the trust decided on 27 April 2010 not to act on that because it was satisfied that the actions

that it was taking included protection of patient safety. The inquiry said that the additional information from the case investigator's report ought to have removed any doubt that the trust might have had about whether to report the matter as an SAI, as it clearly met the relevant criteria. In particular, the inquiry points out that the trust's actions did not protect patients whose records were missing or grossly incomplete. In fact, there was a lack of any formal communication with HSCB, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and PHA at that stage on the issues relating to services in the trust. The inquiry's view is that it is almost certain that the reporting of an SAI would have produced an insistence that the risk to patients, including, for example, the risk posed by missing records, would have been more urgently alleviated than was the case.

As the look back progressed, the inquiry's view is that the trust must have been aware between April and November 2010 that the disturbing picture from the look back of major, intermediate and minor concerns in respect of the impact on patients' health was continuing to emerge and that the problem of missing and incomplete records was significant. The report also says that it would be grossly unfair to fail to acknowledge that the trust communicated fully with the regulatory bodies, namely the General Medical Council (GMC) and the General Dentistry Council (GDC).

On 4 November 2010, the draft look-back report was received by the trust, and it received the final report on 1 December 2010. The trust decided that a call back of certain patients should be undertaken as a precaution in view of the report's findings. On receipt of the report, the trust contacted the DHSSPS, the HSCB and the PHA in late November/early December 2010. The HSCB immediately queried whether an SAI report should be made. Eventually, the matter was reported as an SAI on 7 February 2011.

The inquiry also finds that there was a significant problem with the keeping of patient records in the oral medicine department of the dental hospital. The specialists undertaking the look-back case review between December 2009 and November 2010 encountered serious difficulties due to the lack of availability of patients' records when they required them. The report's statistics indicate an extremely serious deficiency in record management that

could have had a serious adverse impact on the quality of patient care.

3.45 pm

Given the volume and geographical spread of patients with disease requiring specialist oral medicine input, the inquiry suggests that there was a potential risk of patient care being compromised when relying on one practitioner to provide the service in such circumstances. The problem of excessive workloads was exacerbated by the lack of an adequate secretarial and administrative support system.

The trust acted to address the interests of the patients whose case notes suggested major concerns in the look-back exercise. Fifteen of the 22 cases concerned the treatment of oral cancer and related conditions, and it is known that four of those 15 people have died, possibly as a consequence of oral cancer. The extent of the impact that the delay in diagnosis or referral has had on the outcome for those patients, or for the other patients with malignant disease associated with the mouth, is unknown at this stage.

The inquiry expresses concern at the limited extent of open communication with these patients. Best practice discourages paternalism in patient-provider interactions. Patients who are not fully informed are at greater risk of non-compliance and the overlooking or ignoring of symptoms that may need to be addressed. The inquiry report states that the relationship of trust between patient and provider should not be compromised by keeping information from patients, however well meaning the reasoning.

I understand from the trust that the other seven patients in the major concern groups have not been diagnosed as having oral cancer. Some of those seven had undergone multiple X-rays of the salivary ducts and glands, which involves exposure to radiation. It is not known whether there has been any adverse impact on the health of any patient due to the excessive or unnecessary use of such X-rays. The matter is being further reviewed.

The trust has also told the Department that, of the group of patients about whom the look-back exercise found intermediate concerns, none of those 117 patients has developed oral cancer by reason of delay in diagnosis or referral. It is not known whether there has been any other adverse impact on their health, whether physical or psychological.

In summary, the inquiry concluded that there were serious deficiencies in the quality of care provided by the oral medicine department of the dental hospital and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to the patients recalled for review. That may have impacted adversely on the health of some of them to a significant degree, and it certainly had the potential to do so. The inquiry also found that there was a failure by the trust to communicate fully, effectively and promptly with the other Health and Social Care (HSC) bodies in an appropriate manner and that there was a failure by DHSSPS to proactively seek further communication from the trust. The primary responsibility for the failure to provide a proper formal report rests with the trust.

The inquiry states that DHSSPS ought to have been more proactive, given the information that was available to it. My officials have told me that they accept that criticism. The trust also accepts that significant lessons about communications have been learned from this incident. Those failures in communication contributed to the risk of harm to the patients concerned, as they prevented wider knowledge of the problems, as well as allocations of appropriate expertise and resources to ensure that they were addressed as quickly and effectively as possible.

I do not doubt that a number of individuals dealing with this complex situation believed that they were doing the right thing during this time. The inquiry has, however, found that there were serious failings in the care provided, as well as failings in communication, timeliness and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the action taken. Hence, I expect to see change, and the public deserve to see change.

First and foremost, the safety of care that we provide and the interests of the patient must be first and far above all other considerations. I have full confidence that this is the case throughout the HSC and that the Belfast Trust was and is fully committed to that ethos. However, that point cannot be repeated and re-emphasised too often.

Secondly, the confidence of the public in that care is dependent on a culture of openness and transparency. I want to see the culture of all trusts, including all parts of the HSC and my Department, to be one of openness and transparency. That means accepting and

embracing accountability, which should be fundamental to any public service. The public expects this, and I, as Minister, require it. I want to recognise and reinforce the very welcome commitment of the leadership team in the Belfast Trust to this approach.

Given the increasing complexity of healthcare, no service can be without risk, but I do expect all organisations to identify and manage those risks. In the right culture, there will be proper and timely reporting of concerns and an active approach to the management of those concerns.

Key issues for me are encouraging the reporting and appropriate investigation and management of concerns; the recording and management of adverse incidents and their inter-relationship with the investigation into concerns regarding the professional practice of individuals; the communication of major concerns and risks to the HSC board and the Department and the follow-up of those concerns; and the effective management of professional performance, appraisal and supervision.

I want to be assured that the governance and communications arrangements in the Belfast Trust are robust. There have been failings in this regard, and I will expect the trust's chief executive to address those. I also require the permanent secretary to assure me that the arrangements for governance and communication between the Department and all parts of the HSC are robust and effective and provide a clear basis for accountability.

To ensure effective management of the full range of HSC services, I require of my Department, and all the arm's-length bodies that it oversees, three vital means of control. First, that the Department sets standards that set out clearly and fairly what is expected; secondly, that all organisations have systems of clinical and social care governance that are in line with best practice across the world; and, thirdly, that the right people are in place to apply these principles, and are committed to applying them consistently and rigorously to make this work.

That is what the public expects, and that is what I require. I also wish to acknowledge the many thousands of people who work diligently every day on that basis in the Belfast Trust, and in the wider Health Service.

I believe that the public have good grounds for confidence in the services provided by the

Belfast Trust and more widely because these principles are in place. To build on them, I want to see more robust accountability arrangements, where trusts readily communicate major issues of concern to enable those to be addressed in a proportionate but comprehensive manner.

It needs to be absolutely clear that clinical and social care governance is a statutory responsibility and, as in all other aspects of governance, is a matter for which chief executives in the HSC are directly accountable to the permanent secretary, who is also chief executive of the HSC. That needs to be clearly understood and fully reflected in the accountability arrangements. I will be asking for regular reports from the Department to give me assurance that HSC bodies are operating effective systems for clinical and social care governance and complying with the Department's guidance.

My Department also needs to learn lessons and provide appropriate leadership. I expect to see leadership in the co-ordination of an action plan detailing how all the recommendations arising from the inquiry will be addressed. I expect this to be submitted to me no later than August 2011, with quarterly reports thereafter. Key elements of the action plan will include further work on serious adverse incident reporting and early alert arrangements, with the involvement of the HSC board, the PHA and, where appropriate, the Department to ensure that there is a proactive approach to timely and appropriate action in the interests of patient safety and the reduction of harm.

I will very shortly place the executive summary of the report, including all 45 recommendations, in the Assembly Library. The full report includes some issues that may be subject to regulatory processes that are not complete. Therefore, I cannot publish the report in full at this stage. The 45 recommendations range across issues relating to the care for, and communication with, the patients affected; the management of the oral medicine service; communication within the trust and across the HSC; procedures for reporting and escalation of adverse incidents; and aspects of personnel management and administration.

I am very grateful to the inquiry team for all it has done to help to point to the lessons to be learned from this case. I am not in a position to provide a considered response, but

I want to assure the Assembly that none of the recommendations will be ignored. On the contrary, I will require officials to work through the implications fully and carefully in developing an action plan.

I have also asked my officials to work with members of the inquiry team on the production of the action plan to ensure that it is fully informed by the team's thinking and that there is appropriate consideration of the practical implications of the recommendations for the health and social care sector. I want to be sure that the action plan is effective in applying the lessons learned from the way the issue was handled and that there is no risk of key insights from the inquiry team being lost.

I will share the full action plan with the Health Committee as soon as possible after the summer recess and prior to publication, as I want to ensure that our next steps command the confidence of the Assembly and the public. I also intend to report back to the Assembly and the Health Committee on progress towards full implementation of the action plan in due course.

I now want to turn to other issues pertaining to the Belfast Trust. These are in no way related to the issues at the dental hospital, but I want to include them because they are likely to attract comment, and I wish to hold to the principle that I answer to the Assembly.

I need to draw attention to an irregularity in the pay arrangements for some directors in the Belfast Trust. I regard any breach of control as a serious issue, but I recognise that, in this case, the trust was acting in a way that reduced overall management costs. In 2009, additional payments were made to five directors in the Belfast Trust following a redistribution of duties across the senior team. There was a reduction in the overall number of senior posts, and the duties previously held by some directors who had left the trust were redistributed to existing directors. Those posts carry enormous responsibility by any standard. Therefore, to remunerate individuals, the trust awarded additional payments in the region of 5% to 10% of the existing salary.

However, the senior executive pay scheme does not have the facility routinely to make additional financial awards. As there was, and is, no basis on which those allowances could be paid, the Comptroller and Auditor General has limited his regulatory opinion on the Belfast Trust's 2010-

11 accounts, which have just been laid before the Assembly, in respect of some £26,000 of irregular expenditure.

Members will recall that, following Public Accounts Committee (PAC) criticism in 2001, DHSSPS was, and is, required to exercise strict control over senior pay in the health and social care sector. I remain committed to maintaining that control. In mitigation of the breach, overall savings were secured at the Belfast Trust through a net reduction of two posts at director level.

My Department became aware of the additional payments only in September 2010, and immediate action was taken. An internal investigation was carried out in the Department and in the Belfast Trust. The Department has subsequently strengthened its internal controls to ensure that health and social care organisations follow the necessary process when jobs change significantly.

It is essential that there is fair treatment for all, and that is undermined when action is taken without approval. The necessary approvals have been sought from the Department of Finance and Personnel and put in place to permit the continued payment of those additional allowances, as there is no basis in law on which they can be withdrawn. I do not question the good faith of the individuals concerned or the fact that they have taken on additional and onerous duties, but I do not find it satisfactory that unapproved increases have to continue to be paid. However, I understand that there is no alternative.

To minimise the risk of any similar situation arising again, my permanent secretary wrote to the chairs of all organisations to remind them of their governance responsibilities, particularly the controls over senior pay and the standards expected in public life.

My final point is to advise that it has come to my attention that there may be potential material shortcomings in the procurement of a contract for security services at the Belvoir Park Hospital. To seek assurances that no other arrangements are in place for which appropriate processes were not followed, my permanent secretary discussed the matter with the chief executive of the trust and subsequently wrote to him asking for a formal explanation of the circumstances surrounding that procurement and any associated shortcomings

He has also written to all other arm's-length bodies funded by the Department to seek similar assurances.

4.00 pm

Any failure to comply with the requirements of appropriate practice for procurement and/or contract management is a serious breach of control. I need to be sure that all those who carry responsibility for managing public money comply in full with relevant guidance on competitive procurement and all relevant procurement legislation in services such as security and maintain regular scrutiny of routine payments so that any departures from the required practice are identified and corrected quickly. That is essential so that assurance can be provided to the Assembly that public money is being used properly to provide value for money. For that reason, I have asked my officials to carry out a review of the arrangements for the control of procurement expenditure between and within my Department and its arm's-length bodies. The terms of reference for that review are being drafted, and the review will take place in the coming weeks.

I hope it has been helpful to the Assembly to have a clear and open presentation of the issues. Each involves some cause for concern, and I want to emphasise my commitment that such issues will be addressed fairly, openly and proportionately and that I will give top priority to actions that protect and enhance the safety and quality of services to the public. One common feature of the three issues is the need to ensure strong and effective accountability. I will require that all my Department's arm's-length bodies provide clear and timely assurance to the Department, which acts on my behalf and under my authority on all aspects of governance. Within that framework, top priority must be given to the quality of service and patient safety.

I believe that the vast majority of staff in the Belfast Trust and the wider HSC sector are wholeheartedly committed to those principles and to providing the best possible care. I am also grateful for the diligent public service that is displayed throughout the management of the HSC sector, and I reaffirm my commitment that the Department will act to prevent recurrence of the lapses from acceptable standards that I have had to report today. I thank the Assembly for its attention.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I know that the Chairperson — the Cathaoirleach — normally gets a bit of latitude in these instances. Given the length of the statement and the fact that there are three issues, which are all important, I would be grateful if you would extend that latitude on this occasion.

I thank the Minister for his lengthy statement on the three issues. I want to break them down and ask questions on the dental inquiry in the first instance. The Minister has explained that the inquiry report cannot be printed in full yet because it may be subject to regulatory processes. That invites the question "Was the Department not aware of those regulatory processes before the report was commissioned?". How much did it cost to undertake the report? Given that the Minister has said that he is keen on full transparency and accountability, it is unfortunate that the report cannot be printed in full at this time. I am sure, given the seniority of Brian Fee QC and his team, that it would not have come cheap. It is a bit of a concern that it cannot yet be printed.

The Minister informed the House that the report contained 45 recommendations and contained criticisms of the Belfast Trust, the HSC sector and the Department. I felt, having read the statement and listened to the Minister today, that the issues to do with the Department were actually quite light. I would like to tease out the criticisms of and the difficulties in the Department. I think that he has been comprehensive about the others, but the same detail is not given for the Department. How many of the 45 recommendations relate to each of the three bodies?

Although I fully accept and welcome the fact that the report states that the inquiry clearly found that there were serious failings in the care provided, in communication and in the timeliness and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the action taken, that is not what we as an Assembly want to see, and it is good that the Minister is addressing that. However, judging by the language used, the inquiry concluded that there were serious deficiencies in the quality of care. It goes on to state that those deficiencies may have impacted adversely on the health of some patients to a significant degree and certainly had the potential to do so. Again,

however, it is light on the details. If people died as a result of not getting a diagnosis early enough, that is extremely serious. If the potential was there, that is serious. We need to separate out those issues, all of which need to be taken in at the right level.

I also welcome the Minister's assertion of the need for a culture of openness, transparency and accountability, but we have not heard an awful lot from him about his Department's role in addressing the three issues that he raised today. Ultimately, as Minister, he has overall responsibility. Is he committed to realising that the buck stops with him?

I will move on quickly to the other two issues. This is the first time that the issues surrounding security services at Belvoir Park Hospital have been discussed in the House. Given that, I expect that there may be an element of disappointment that the Minister did not refer to the fact that patients' records were left behind and that those urban guerrillas or whatever they are called broke into the hospital site and that there was no mention of the fact that those patient records were photographed and then offered for sale on the internet. There has been no apology to the families who have been affected by those events. It would have been appropriate to include that along with the explanation of the procurement arrangements.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Gildernew: OK. The Minister talked about the issue surrounding irregularities in senior pay, but he did not mention what savings would be made. That detail is not there either.

Mr Poots: There is a range of issues, and I will try to respond to them as quickly as possible. It is our intention to print the report at the earliest opportunity, but, given that inquiries are ongoing, it would be inappropriate to do so in case the report would have an adverse impact on other actions that are being carried out. The cost of the report has not yet been finalised, because it was completed only last week. We will make that available in due course.

I will move on to the departmental issues that were identified. The report laid considerably greater emphasis on the trust. The department was criticised for taking insufficient action to pursue questions about the progress of the review. A large number of recommendations were

made that affect the whole service and were, therefore, matters for the Department, affecting in particular the complex area of medicine. It is not possible to identify exactly the effect of late diagnoses on the patients concerned, but we want to make it absolutely clear that we have identified that an issue exists, that we want to ensure that it does not arise again and that these are the actions that we are taking. There is no evidence that anyone has died as a result of a late diagnosis, but, nonetheless, we always emphasise that it is good to get early diagnoses in cancer treatments.

Where does responsibility lie? It lies right here. That is why I am here: to explain to Members, as public representatives, what happened; to determine whether the service provided has fallen down; and to outline the actions that we have put in place to ensure that it does not happen again. I have to lay it clearly on the line: trust chief executives who step over the line in this respect again will not be treated with kid gloves. The management of the Belfast Trust changed late last year, and many of the issues at hand do not apply to the current chief executive. However, I want to make it abundantly clear that the Department will not tolerate any failure by chief executives to operate with openness and transparency. Issues that are identified by the trust's senior management must be brought to the Department, after which it is up to the Department to inform me and, therefore, Assembly Members.

On the subject of the Belvoir Park Hospital site, when I attended the Committee a number of weeks ago, I made it clear that it was unacceptable that patients' records were used in the way in which they were used. The main responsibility for that lies with the people who benefited personally from going through and making public other people's records. Those people should be identified as the main culprits, because they stole people's information. The Department and the trust had a responsibility to protect that information, and that did not happen, so I do not shy away from reiterating the apology that I made to the Committee.

On the subject of pay, two senior directors stepping down from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust would have saved in the region of £200,000. Therefore, the additional payment of some £26,000 was a net saving to the trust. However, all the other trusts also made net savings, and all the other trusts

applied through the proper system for pay rises for senior directors and were rejected. The trust in question did not play by the rules and was rewarded for it. That is unacceptable.

Mr Wells: I welcome the Minister's openness and transparency. The school of dentistry issue was one in a series of revelations that plagued the Health Service from Christmas to Easter this year. As the then Chairperson of the Health Committee, I remember regularly having to bring in officials from various trusts and the board to answer questions on the latest revelation. Therefore, I strongly welcome the fact that the Minister has decided, on this occasion, to preempt media revelations by coming before the House to tell us exactly how it is and what he is going to do about it. Will he assure the House that, should other issues arise that he believes could lead to public concern, he will continue this practice of coming before the House to tell us how it is — warts and all — and to outline what he intends to do so that there will be no further ambushes on Committees or Members?

Mr Poots: Openness and transparency in public life is important, and the more we engage in an open and transparent way, the more confidence the public will have in the House, the Executive and the governance of this country. Therefore, it is my desire to be open and transparent with the public on all occasions relating to such matters.

I indicated to my permanent secretary — this was relayed to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust — that, if there are any other carcasses in the cupboard, we had better know about them pretty soon. We want to ensure that, if there is anything else that has not lived up to the standard of practice that we would expect to see, we find out about it and make it known to the public. More importantly, no further engagement in such practices should happen, and the message must get through to trusts that, as custodians of public money, they provide something of the highest importance to individuals — their healthcare — and it is imperative that they do that in a way that abides by the standards set down by the House and the Executive.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I associate myself and my party with the Minister's expression of sympathy to the families of those affected. The issues outlined in the statement are very serious.

Does the Minister agree that the thread that seems to link all three incidents — the problem

at the school of dentistry; not following the pay guidance; and, indeed, not following guidance on securing the Belvoir Park site — is the fact that, although we had processes to deal with them, by not communicating to the Department that there was a problem, the trusts seemed to ignore those processes?

4.15 pm

Mr Poots: I agree fully with the Member. Proper considerations have been put in place for trusts to abide by, and, in that instance, the Belfast Trust did not abide by them. No trust is an independent island that can carry out and engage in its own activities and ignore the codes of practice that have been put in place for it to observe. I have given early warning that, if this happens in the future, it will be a very significant issue that I will regard as a disciplinary matter. Each accounting officer of each trust should take cognisance of that. It would not be right for the House and me, as the Minister who is responsible to the House, to ignore that activity and to allow it to continue.

Mr McDevitt: You could hardly imagine a more serious statement, with three serious omissions and errors in a single trust being reported to the House. I am sure that many of us are thinking of this question right now: has any clinician or official at trust or departmental level been referred for disciplinary action? If so, what action has been taken against those who have let themselves, their employers and this region down so badly?

Mr Poots: In my statement I indicated that I would not get into the issue of individuals. Other inquiries are going on. The GMC and GDC have responsibilities for deciding who acts as clinicians. That decision is not in my hands; it is in the hands of the expert body that regulates that activity.

Mr McCarthy: It is a truly horrendous statement that the Minister has been forced to make this afternoon. I am sure that we are all shocked and aghast at the outcome. My thoughts are with those who have suffered as a result of the total and absolute negligence. My query is along the lines of Conall McDevitt's: are the people who were responsible for the events that the Minister outlined still in post? Could it happen again? The Minister referred to the current chief executive, who was not in post at the time. However, there must have been a chief executive in post at the time with overall

responsibility for all of that horrendous stuff. Is nobody accountable? The Minister said that the buck stops with him —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr McCarthy: — of course, we know that. Are the people who were responsible for that horrendous litany of failures still in post?

Mr Poots: The previous chief executive has retired, so that individual is clearly not in post. On the clinical side, I indicated at the outset that that is a matter for the GDC and GMC to determine. Once that determination is concluded, decisions can be taken arising from that.

I should correct the Member, who said that I was forced to make the statement. I received the information, and I was not particularly pleased about it, but I certainly was not forced to make the statement. I wanted to make the statement and to make the House aware of the issues of which I was aware because it is a matter of public confidence. If we wish to restore public confidence, it has to be done in an open and transparent way. Therefore, it was imperative that I made the statement, but I certainly was not forced to.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. On the issue of senior executive pay, I welcome the fact that action has been taken to reduce the risk of this happening again. Will the Minister clarify whether it was a serious breach of the trust's corporate governance responsibilities?

Mr Poots: It was. People who were engaged in the issue knew that they were in breach or that they were not doing their job properly because some people who received additional pay had responsibility for corporate governance in the trust. That is a very serious issue. They were the beneficiaries of the money, but they knew full well that they were not entitled to go ahead and award it. I have a major issue with the breakdown between the Department and the trust in this instance. It is an intolerable situation and cannot be permitted to happen again.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. In relation to communication, it is my understanding that problems relating to dental issues were first reported in December 2009. Will the Minister detail what action

the Department took to address the problem between December 2009 and February 2011?

Mr Poots: The issue went on for a period of time, and, when the Department became aware of it, we impressed on the trust the need to go back and check all records. That process took 11 months and identified over 100 issues. At that point, patients were recalled, 40 of whom had biopsies. From a trawl of 3,000 records, we identified 18 breaches. After further investigation, that went up to 22 serious breaches, 15 of which were identified as oral cancer. Another seven cases related to oral problems, but they were non-cancerous. Therefore, work was done to identify people who had the potential for a late diagnosis. Those people were recalled and went through the treatment process. The people who were recalled appear to be satisfied with the standard of the subsequent work, which was done in a very professional way.

Mr I McCrea: I also welcome the Minister's statement and his willingness to come before the House in relation to his portfolio. Constituents have complained about the time that it takes for treatment at the dental hospital. Is the Minister aware of whether the dental hospital or the school of dentistry require additional funding? In that same vein, will he give an assessment of the long-term future of the school of dentistry?

Mr Poots: The school of dentistry receives its funding from the Belfast Trust, which we fund. The report states that the dental school is in a strong financial position, with income to the university and the trust being sufficient to meet the needs of a thriving institution. My Department has made additional funds available to refurbish clinical areas, and the university is investing further capital in training facilities. The university is also actively recruiting more staff to ensure that teaching is adequate. Therefore, funding is in place for the good management of the hospital to ensure that patients receive a good service and that students who are training to be dentists receive good training. It is a matter for the management of the facility, whether through Queen's University for the training of dentists or the Belfast Trust on the health side, to ensure that there is good practice throughout the facility.

Mr Byrne: I declare an interest, and I recognise the Minister's sincerity and the way in which he

has handled the issue, particularly the dental school.

First, what has been done to build morale again and to reassure good, professional staff in the dental school that the problem will be fixed? Secondly, can students at the dental school be reassured that their job prospects are not being inhibited? Lastly, will potential patients be told that the service is reliable and totally professional and will not again lead to the problems that we have just heard about?

Mr Poots: The Member raised three issues, starting with morale. If there is a problem that people are talking about in the backwoods, it is far better that that problem is made public and identified and the solutions identified and acted upon. If we want to have confidence, we need to clear the carcasses out of the cupboard and to get rid of the material that has been holding the facility back. Let us move forward in a way in which the public can have confidence, and, if the public have confidence in the service, it will inevitably raise the morale of the people in that facility. There are numerous people in the Health Service and in the school of dentistry who are carrying out their work and services to the best of their ability in a very professional and dedicated way. Many people go beyond the call of duty. I have already spoken to my colleague in DEL, Stephen Farry, and indicated to him that it is imperative that there is full confidence in the dental school. As a result, he and I will meet, and we will seek that the vice chancellor of Queen's University and the chief executive of the Belfast Trust attend that meeting to ensure that, if there are outstanding issues on the training side of that facility, we deal with them and ensure that people are proud to be associated with that training institution and have a strong desire to be educated there.

The public should get quality treatment at the Royal School of Dentistry. They should have no concerns that the treatment that they receive at that unit at the facility will be defective in any way, shape or form. They can also be confident that, if they are dissatisfied with the treatment that they receive and make that known through the complaints procedure, that will be treated seriously. We will respond if someone comes forward with genuine problems or grievances as a result of treatment that has been received or not received.

Mrs Lewis: I thank the Minister for his statement on the very serious matter of the dental inquiry. What harm was caused to patients, and what feedback, if any, has been received from patients or their families on the harm that was caused to them, including, for example, psychological effects that were experienced as a result?

Mr Poots: We have not identified that harm has been caused to patients as a result of this. It is clear that we had concerns about how 22 people were diagnosed, and, as a result of looking into that, it transpired that 15 of them had cancer. Subsequently, four have died of cancer. Three of those deaths related to oral cancer, and one related to another cancer. It is important that people are diagnosed in a timely way and that they can have full confidence in the services that are provided. I believe that that is the current situation at the school of dentistry, and we will seek to ensure that that continues to be the case.

Mr T Clarke: I join other Members in thanking the Minister for his statement. There are three areas to this, and, given that much of the concentration has been on two of them, I will focus on the last one. Reference has been made to the procurement of security services at Belvoir Park Hospital. Will the Minister indicate how much that contract was worth originally and how it was awarded? Were there shortcomings in that process?

4.30 pm

Mr Poots: The contract was worth £190,000 per annum and has been paid out for five years now. So, £950,000 has been paid out. One of the more positive things about this is that that figure appears to be at the lower end of costs associated with services provided by the security industry. The issue is that people did not have an opportunity to bid for the contract. We did not go through the normal procurement processes, and it simply is not good enough that a contract through which a supplier receives close to £1 million did not go through the proper processes and channels. It broke EU rules, and it broke our own procurement rules. That is a wholly unsatisfactory situation. We are trying to ascertain exactly how the contract came about, but it appears not to have gone through the normal processes or channels and may have been carried out by way of conversations with people who knew other people in the security industry.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, pay tribute to the Minister for his statement. It is truly refreshing to see a Health Minister who operates his office with transparency. Has there been a loss to the public purse as a result of the issues at Belvoir Park? If so, what action do you plan to take?

Mr Poots: I do not think that there has been a loss as a result of the non-procurement of the security services because we did not pay excessively for the security services provided. The loss was, perhaps, in public confidence, given that people's information subsequently appeared for sale on internet sites. Therefore, there was a significant loss in that we lost the confidence of the public. We also lost a significant amount of money by holding on to the property when we had no purpose for it. The advice from Land and Property Services was that we should go through a process of applying for planning approval to maximise the value of the site. I observe that quite a number of people went through the same process from 2005 to 2008, and they did not receive their planning approval early enough. As a consequence, when they received planning approval, the site was worth considerably less than it was without planning approval.

I question why, during a period of very high property prices, which people knew could not continue because prices were nine or 10 times the value of people's mortgages — that does not fit with any economist's assessment of what is sustainable — we held on to a property that had been identified in the Belfast metropolitan area plan as having 24 acres that were suitable for development. Given its superb location in south Belfast, one would anticipate that that would have brought tens of millions of pounds into the Department for reinvestment. We are now sitting with a property of a considerably lesser value. That is the real loss; it is not in the procurement of services. Nonetheless, if we are to procure services to the value of almost £1 million, that needs to be done in a proper and correct way, and people need to have the opportunity to bid for the contract.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Is it the case that when the Belfast Trust moved off the site responsibility transferred to the Department? Also, will the review of the arrangements for the control of procurement expenditure in the Department and in arm's-length bodies not delay decisive action?

Is a review really necessary in a situation such as this?

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust continues to have the responsibility of looking after that site, and the Department grants it money to do so.

The Department has given an allowance to the Belfast Trust to provide the security for that facility, to look after a degree of essential maintenance, to pay the rates and so forth. Therefore, the Department pays for that element.

On the review of services, I could come in here and, within weeks, start to change services. Presented with an approach of that nature, I have no doubt that Members would jump up and down to indicate that this and that should not be happening in their constituency. I want a very short, sharp review that will provide me with professional analyses of services provided on the clinical and social services sides.

If the Committee is recalled, I will be happy to give it a full explanation, because I have to go to the Executive for approval for any such review, and I have not been able to do that before the Assembly goes into summer recess. However, I am happy to respond to the Committee and to make a written statement to the Speaker, which will then be passed on to all Members, so that I keep people fully informed of my intentions as the Minister responsible for health and also as a Minister responsible to the House.

Mr G Robinson: How long has that firm been handling security at Belvoir Park Hospital? He may have already answered this question, but why has the site not been sold by now?

Mr Poots: The security company has looked after that site for five years. The site has not been sold because Land and Property Services guidance was followed that stated that planning permission should be obtained before going to the open market. That led to the delay, and it demonstrates the unacceptability of where we are now in Northern Ireland with the planning system and everything else. That is why, when I held a previous position, I wanted to fundamentally change planning. I hope that, through the Planning Act 2011 and other work that we carried out, there will be a change to a much more responsive planning system, one that will meet the needs of the private and public sectors in Northern Ireland at the same time as taking account of local residents' views.

Committee Business

Caesarean Sections

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that the Speaker has been given notice that the motion will not be moved today. However, as it is still on the Order Paper, it will need to be dealt with formally.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place measures to reduce the high rate of Caesarean sections, given the risks to both mother and child, as well as the cost to the Health Service. — [Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Motion not moved.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Jobs and Benefits Project: Strabane

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who are called to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I had hoped that the Minister for Employment and Learning would join us for the Adjournment debate. I am not sure whether he has forwarded an explanation. It appears that the Minister for Social Development may be stepping in for the Minister for Employment and Learning. I thank him for doing that, because it is important to have ministerial attendance at Adjournment debates. I thank Minister McCausland for stepping in for Minister Farry on this occasion.

At the outset, I apologise on behalf of my colleague Michaela Boyle, who is unavoidably absent. I also point out that my colleague Pat Doherty MP has lobbied strongly on the Adjournment topic for a number of years. The research that I carried out for the debate reminded me of a number of pertinent questions that Pat Doherty MP MLA asked on the issue, both in the House and as questions for written answer.

My reason for introducing this topic resulted partly from a recent visit to the jobs and benefits office in Omagh — Omagh and Strabane being the two principal towns in west Tyrone. I visited the jobs and benefits office in Omagh, where I witnessed a really good joined-up benefit and job-brokering service that keeps jobseekers in touch with the labour market. As I understand it, that is precisely what the jobs and benefits project was designed to achieve. To date, I understand that the project has been rolled out across the North, with 27 offices operating as co-location. In towns such as Omagh, that clearly benefits the jobseekers and people of the district.

I am alarmed by the fact that Strabane is one of eight areas, including North Belfast, which is the Minister's constituency, Cookstown, Bangor and other towns, where the project has not been rolled out. The likes of Strabane, Cookstown and North Belfast feature regularly in a high position on the unemployment league table. So, I find it hard to understand why those locations were not prioritised in the first tranche, or at least at an earlier stage, of the project development.

I understand that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department for Social Development (DSD) made a joint bid for somewhere in the region of £37.3 million for capital investment under Budget 2010. The bid was unsuccessful, and it left eight areas without that type of provision.

I emphasised my visit to the jobs and benefits office in Omagh, because best practice is obviously at work there. Therefore, why should Strabane, Cookstown, North Belfast and other locations — those eight places — not benefit similarly? We have been told that the jobs and benefits project has been abandoned.

I want to drill down and get an explanation as to what happened with Strabane. NIPSA has said that it understands that there were a number of difficulties, ranging from car parking to the unavailability of appropriate sites. I want to hear more about that, specifically where Strabane is concerned. The jobs office and the benefits office are at two different locations in the town. How hard did DEL and DSD try? That is the crux of the question. Where was the political will? Was it there, or was it absent?

Typically, if Departments want to develop facilities in a town, they ask the local government authority to search for land and property so see whether there is suitable provision. Presumably there is a yes answer to this question: was Strabane District Council properly, meaningfully and fully consulted on possibilities in the town that could realise the proposal? Strabane consistently has one of the highest unemployment rates. As of May 2011, it is my understanding that Derry's unemployment figure was 7.5%, Belfast's was 6.9% and Strabane's was 6.9%. The Strabane district has 1,756 claimants for a population of more than 39,000.

The decision to shelve the project in Strabane has caused great disappointment and consternation. I think that Minister Farry and Minister McCausland need to take a fresh look

at the situation. Placing Strabane at the tail end of the roll-out of this project is illogical; it begs many questions. You would think that the first place you would locate such a project would be Strabane and that it would not feature low down in the chronological priority.

4.45 pm

Essentially, that is the case that I am presenting today. I have a good understanding of the range of Department for Employment and Learning provision in the jobs and benefits offices and the Social Security Agency/DSD provision in the co-location offices. They work very well. The towns that have been left out or left behind, not least the town of Strabane, for which I am making the case today, deserve equality in the matter. I have asked a number of questions. I would be very grateful if the Minister was able to address them.

Mr Buchanan: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the Adjournment debate today regarding the closure of the jobs and benefits project in Strabane. I will be keeping my comments fairly brief because I think that a lot of the areas have been covered. It is disappointing that the Minister for Employment and Learning has been unable to attend today, but we are grateful that we have the Minister for Social Development here to answer some of our questions and address some of our concerns surrounding the issue.

I believe that the bringing together of the Social Security Agency and Department for Employment and Learning staff onto one site within one purpose-designed building is the only effective way in which an efficient and effective service can be delivered by the jobs and benefits staff. That is to be commended. I also commend the Department on the 27 such offices that have been delivered across Northern Ireland. However, it is disappointing that Strabane falls into the category of the eight remaining. Although I am not here to cry poor mouth, I most certainly will continue to lobby for West Tyrone and insist that it receives equality of treatment — a great term in the House — in line with the other constituencies.

The office in Omagh has been used as an example of the effectiveness of having two units co-located in one office. I can testify to that, having been in that office with constituents and having seen exactly how each unit works in tandem with the other. That is testimony to how this type of thing works. We are here today to

lobby for the project in Strabane, which was on the schedule but has been set to the side, to be brought back on stream so that we can get it delivered.

Many people who have been in employment all their lives now find themselves unemployed because of the economic situation. Going to a jobs and benefits office is a stigma for them; it is a place that they do not want to go to. They are not used with going to those places; it is unfamiliar to them. They would much rather be in a place of employment. It is a stigma for them and that keeps them from going to it. To have a situation in which they have to go to two offices, which are some distance apart, as is the case in Strabane, adds to their frustration, and, perhaps, discourages them and turns them away. That is why it is so important and essential that we seek to bring this on stream.

I have a couple of questions. Has enough been done to find a co-location site for the two bodies? I know that it is, at times, difficult to find a site for this type of project, but I wonder whether enough work has been done on the issue with the chief executive of Strabane District Council and others in that area. What difficulties stood in the way? If there were difficulties that meant that a site could not be found, what were they? Could they be looked at again and overcome?

What was it that pushed Strabane beyond the 27 other projects that have already been delivered? We commend the Department for the 27 projects that have been delivered, but there are another eight that have not, including Strabane. Perhaps that should be looked at again.

The case has been made for the jobs and benefits centre, and there is merit in having it. Other places need that service too, but I am lobbying for one in Strabane as soon as practicable. I ask the Minister to take that on board, look at the issue again and see whether there is any way to bring the project on stream with DSD and DEL working in conjunction to see what can be done to bring forward this project and ensure that it is delivered for the people of Strabane.

Mr Hussey: I, too, thank the Minister for taking the time to be with us this afternoon. I am sure that he had a different afternoon planned but, unfortunately, he had to be here instead. I thank him for coming to listen to our concerns. When Mr McElduff mentioned that he had visited the

jobs and benefits office in Omagh, I wondered whether he thought that he was not going to be re-elected to this House. He clarified that he was there with constituents. Like Mr Buchanan, I have visited the jobs and benefits office in Omagh, and I concur with Members' remarks so far. An excellent service is provided in Omagh, the county town of Tyrone.

We are here to talk about the wider issues in west Tyrone, but specifically Strabane. I looked at the 'West Tyrone Area Plan 2019', and it includes certain comments that you would look for if implementing a best-practice policy in seeking a place to set up a project of this nature:

"Based on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Scores, Strabane District Council ranks as the most deprived District Council area on average in Northern Ireland... Strabane has notably higher percentages of people who are unemployed or permanently sick or disabled, and notably lower numbers of people who are economically active and in full time employment, than the Northern Ireland average... Strabane has a noticeably lower percentage of people working as managers, senior officials and professional occupations, and a significantly higher percentage working in skilled trade occupations and as process, plant and machine operatives, than the Northern Ireland average... Strabane has 12.32 more of its population with no qualifications and a significantly lower percentage of people with every level of qualification, than the Northern Ireland average."

When I first saw the statement from DSD and DEL on the Strabane office, I was very surprised. In fact, my initial comment was that it was illogical; it did not make sense. The place where I would have immediately set up an office of that nature was Strabane. When you look at the specific tasks of the Department for Employment and Learning, you would expect to see it try to provide some sort of support to move 20- to 30-year-olds forward. Anyone who operated best practice should have looked at Strabane for the first office. Strabane could have been a shining example to others.

None of us seems to be able to understand why Strabane was in the remaining eight and why it suddenly had the rug pulled. There have been comments such as "unavailability of sites" and "difficulty in parking". The jobs and benefits office in Omagh does not have easy access to parking; you have to walk quite a bit to get there. However, in these circumstances, people would be prepared to walk quite a bit because of the service that that type of office would provide.

Questions have been asked by Mr Buchanan and Mr McElduff, and I do not intend to repeat them, but we need answers. It is quite clear that we have a united voice from west Tyrone, and I am sure that Mr Byrne will join that.

Mr McElduff: The Member may not be aware of this, but it was his then party leader who christened the West Tyrone six, "Team West Tyrone".

Mr Hussey: Come on, Tyrone; we're on our own. We intend to support Strabane. Strabane has a history of being an unemployment black spot; we do not want it to maintain that reputation. We, as representatives from West Tyrone, support such an office being sited in Strabane, and we look to both Ministers to do their best to reverse this decision.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister for Social Development to the debate. I, too, am amazed at central government's decision to bypass Strabane once again. Strabane has a history of high unemployment and was once described as the unemployment black spot of Europe. That high unemployment creates a case for having a co-located office for social security staff and jobs and benefits staff. Unfortunately, Strabane has suffered government neglect for a very long time. I do not want to get into whingeing mode, but that is a fact.

The decision has angered people. I spent Saturday in Strabane, and a number of people told me that, once again, they had been let down. Staff in the social security office are also being let down. Many of them operate out of prefab buildings that are over 30 years old, and their working conditions are very poor. Therefore, I ask that the Minister give further consideration to creating a better working environment with new office accommodation.

Staff feel let down and are uncertain about their future; they need an assurance that social security jobs in Strabane will be maintained. I appeal to the Minister to listen sensitively to the pleas that I, and other Members for West Tyrone, have made. From time to time, Strabane needs a positive signal from government. I was delighted that, when he was Minister for Social Development, Minister Attwood announced a new footbridge for Strabane, which was regarded by the local community as a very positive signal. However, this issue is causing grave concern. The time has come for Strabane to get a positive signal from central government that it

is a place that can be invested in and that the co-located office will be sited there.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, and I have listened to Members' comments. Those of us who live in areas in which the co-location of the jobs and benefits and social security offices has taken place can see the benefits already. In Dungannon, for example, that has happened, and has benefited the community. We know too, from the experience of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the benefit for farmers when it brought together its direct offices and located services under one roof. We know that co-location works and is a good idea.

We welcome the fact that the Department for Social Development was taking forward the project. However, as a rural dweller, I will always look at the rural implications. Over the past decade, much has been said about Strabane's being an economic black spot with high unemployment and a need for people to be helped back into work. Therefore, it would have made sense to do the Strabane project first instead of leaving it to the end. I am not here to give the Minister a hard time about the money not being there to complete the project. However, in these challenging times it would be welcome.

The Rural White Paper shows that this is the kind of thing that should not happen: if there are needs in rural areas, they should be addressed. We should not always be left at the end of the queue. People in Cookstown are equally aggrieved about this issue. We would like a change in emphasis from the Executive to ensure that rural dwellers and communities are not put to the bottom of the pile, that their needs are addressed and their rights taken into consideration. It would have been helpful if the Strabane project had been done first, given all that it has suffered, instead of being left until the last and then falling off the end.

5.00 pm

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The jobs and benefits project started in 2001 and was designed to improve services to jobseekers by co-locating the services of the Social Security Agency's social security offices and the Department for Employment and Learning. The delivery of jobs and benefits offices has been mainly achieved

through the refurbishment of existing social security office buildings. However, it became clear, at an early stage of the jobs and benefits project, that a number of offices would require purpose-built premises because of issues with the capacity and quality of the existing offices.

Ten newbuilds were grouped at the end because they were in need of a major procurement programme, and the office in Strabane fell into that group. Although there was good progress in developing the initial 25 new jobs and benefits offices, there was significant slippage in the delivery of the last 10 offices, due to difficulties in identifying sites and procurement issues.

As a result of a procurement exercise in 2006, two sites were originally identified for the new Strabane jobs and benefits office. However, one did not offer value for money, and the other did not meet the necessary quality criteria. The next step was to consider how the existing site could be used. A review considered options for either a full office refurbishment or a refurbishment of front office only, and planning applications for both models were submitted, with approval being received during 2009.

At the beginning of 2010, due to concerns about the availability of future funding, it was decided not to progress a number of offices, including the one in Strabane, until the 2010 spending review allocation was confirmed. Overall, allocations to Northern Ireland from Her Majesty's Treasury were subject to a 40% capital reduction. All Departments have been obliged, therefore, to make difficult decisions about the future delivery of projects. The inability to deliver a new jobs and benefits office in Strabane is, therefore, a result of not receiving capital funding in response to bids submitted in the spending review in 2010.

To date, 27 jobs and benefits offices have been delivered. It is regrettable that new jobs and benefits offices cannot be delivered in Strabane and the seven other areas impacted by the decision. As Members noted, my constituency of North Belfast was one of the areas that did not benefit from a new office. The other areas were Newtownards, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Cookstown, Bangor and Ballynahinch. The total cost of delivering those remaining jobs and benefits offices would have been in the region of £37.3 million.

We considered other options, such as limited refurbishment using the existing social security

offices and jobcentres, but that still needed capital investment in excess of £6 million. We also considered using the existing infrastructure without any capital investment, but there was insufficient accommodation in many of the eight locations, including Strabane. Both the Social Security Agency and our partner, the Department for Employment and Learning's employment service, remain fully committed to assisting people into employment and to meeting our customers' benefit needs. Indeed, the whole point of bringing together the benefits office and the jobs office was to give a strong sense of benefits leading to employment. We do not want to keep people on benefits; rather, we want to get them into employment. I do not think that anyone would dispute that bringing together the two offices was a good and positive thing.

The vast majority of our customers in Strabane and in the other social security offices are already getting a work-focused service, given the jobseeker's allowance conditionality and changes to incapacity benefit and lone parent regulations. Carers in receipt of income support are not subject to a work-focused interview as part of their claim process. Those customers would be likely to have their work-focused interview waived or deferred, given the impact of caring responsibilities on their availability for work.

The current labour market situation continues to present real challenges in Strabane, with over 1,700 clients claiming jobseeker's allowance and only five vacancies currently notified to the employment service for the Strabane area. The Department for Employment and Learning is working closely with Invest NI to assist client companies and potential inward investors to recruit employees, particularly from among the long-term unemployed. The Steps to Work programme has assisted clients in developing their skills, and 95 clients in Strabane who are currently in employment receive an employer subsidy through that programme. The Steps Ahead strand of that programme currently provides temporary waged employment for 39 long-term unemployed people in Strabane.

The fact that there will be no jobs and benefits office in Strabane will have no impact on the number of staff employed. Currently, 69 staff are employed in the social security office and the jobcentre, and staffing numbers in the remaining social security offices and jobcentres will not be impacted by the decision. I recognise that there are some accommodation issues,

which were noted, in the existing offices, but I am committed to addressing those. My colleague Minister Stephen Farry and I remain committed to exploiting opportunities for the delivery of jobs and benefits services in the eight remaining offices, and we will progress those on a case-by-case basis. We have not given up on any of those locations, and that includes Strabane.

Members raised specific questions during the debate. One related to the delays in delivering a new office in Strabane. A combination of factors led to that delay. The first of those was the difficulty in finding a site. Of the two sites identified as the result of a procurement exercise in 2006, one did not represent value for money, and the other did not meet the necessary quality criteria. The second factor was the time needed to process planning applications for the redevelopment of the existing Social Security Agency site. The third factor was the alignment with the strategic business review, now titled Customer First, which would influence whether a full office or front office only would be delivered in Strabane. Fourthly, Minister Ritchie, in response to strategic business reviews in July 2009, specifically the equality impact assessment, advised that she wished to further evaluate the proposed front-office solution for Strabane. Finally, by the time Ministers agreed to break alignment with the strategic business review in March 2009, the indication of likely difficulties in securing future capital made it impossible to commit to the procurement of a contractor to build a new office.

I hope that that sets out clearly for Members the sequence of factors that contributed to the delay. The procurement issues go back to 2006, and those were followed by further issues with planning and strategic business reviews. The decision was then made to evaluate further whether the office should be a full office or a front office, and, by the time that decision was made, we had encountered financial difficulties.

I understand the affection that Members from West Tyrone have for Strabane, and a point was raised during the debate about why Strabane was not prioritised over other offices. An office priority order was agreed by the Minister for Social Development and the Minister for Employment and Learning in January 2010. It was, therefore, my predecessor in DSD and Minister Farry's predecessor in DEL who reached

that decision. Strabane was given priority among the category 2 offices, which included those in Strabane, Newcastle and Cookstown, on the basis of its history of high unemployment and associated deprivation levels. A number of offices, namely those in north Belfast, Newtownards and Downpatrick were prioritised in advance of Strabane as a result of their greater size and their strategic importance to the delivery of the strategic business review, Customer First, as they delivered the capacity for more centralised processing.

I hope that that clarifies the situation for Members. I appreciate and empathise with their desire for the work to be taken forward. As I said, we will progress that work on a case-by-case basis, and we have not given up on any location, including Strabane.

Adjourned at 5.09 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

Reported Fish Kill at Loughbrickland Lake

*Published at noon
on Friday 22 July, 2011*

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am writing to update members on a reported Fish Kill at Loughbrickland Lake and subsequent media reports regarding the quality of the water on the lake.

Firstly, I would like to assure members that officials in my Department are working closely with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to accurately identify what is causing this pollution and to come up with solutions to alleviate the problem.

The Inland Fisheries Group in my Department has assessed the occurrence at Loughbrickland Lake as a minor fish kill. In fact, on assessing the extent of the problem, my officers found six dead fish.

My Department stocked the lake with farm-reared brown trout on 29 June and 7 July 2011. Around the 12 July there was a very rapid increase in aquatic weed growth on the lake, specifically a surface algal bloom. Summer weather conditions often give rise to periods of sudden and very rapid plant growth that thrive on the nutrient levels in the water column and lake bed. This can lead to reduced oxygen levels in the water, which can reduce chances of fish survival. This increase happened after my Department stocked the lake.

I should point out that the six dead fish recovered from the lake were Roach and not Brown Trout. Roach can be particularly susceptible to environmental stress after they have spawned.

Any reported fish kills are treated seriously by Departmental officials, who investigate the reports in conjunction with a range of agencies. A wide range of factors – both natural and man-made – can impact upon the ecosystem in a body of water.

Loughbrickland Lake, in common with many inter-drumlin lakes in the north of Ireland, reflects land use around it. The lake is now becoming eutrophic¹. Invasive aquatic weed is now common to the lake and Filamentous green algae, known as blanket weed, grow on this submerged weed. This is cleared by my Department using a purpose-built weed cutting machine. The cost effectiveness of this is under review as it treats only the symptoms rather than the cause of weeds.

In conclusion, I would like to assure members that my Department has commenced another schedule of weed cutting which began on 20 July. This work will be carried out and the results assessed before further stocking of the lake continues.

My Department will continue to work closely with the NIEA and other agencies to address water quality and invasive aquatic species issues under the EC Water Framework Directive.

1 A eutrophic body of water, commonly a lake or pond, has high primary productivity due to excessive nutrients and is subject to algal blooms resulting in poor water quality.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements

*Published at 9.30 am
on Wednesday 29 June, 2011*

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):

We have today presented to the Assembly a revised Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements between the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is the principal agreement between the UK Government and the three devolved administrations and sets out the principles which govern relations between them. The MOU was last revised and presented to the Assembly in March 2010 and this version now replaces that document.

The revisions, which were agreed at a plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on 8 June, are to the protocol on dispute avoidance and resolution and will provide a facility for the commissioning of independent analysis to inform inter-administration disagreements.

We have a responsibility for ensuring effective working relations and communication between the devolved administrations, and for helping to resolve any disputes which may arise. In the context of the MOU we will continue to seek to ensure its effective operation to further develop these relations and uphold the interests of this administration.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 24 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Pledge of Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the pledge of office affirmed in order to hold office, to confirm whether the inherent reference to actively encouraging full co-operation with the PSNI in tackling crime includes police investigations of actions by the IRA which occurred before April 1998.

(AQW 4/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Pledge of Office is set out in Schedule 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as amended. OFMDFM has no role in interpreting the Pledge of Office however the normal canons of statutory interpretation apply.

Funding for Victims' Groups

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of funding allocated by their Department to victims' groups in each of the last five years.

(AQW 44/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The amount of funding allocated by OFMDFM to victims and survivors groups in each of the last five years is set out in the Table below.

Year	OFMDFM Funding (£)	OFMDFM Interim Capacity Fund * (£)
2006/07	2,986,638	N/A
2007/08	2,791,080	N/A
2008/09	3,857,189	1,252,944
2009/10	4,557,800	240,138
2010/11	6,283,847	154,625

* In April 2008, OFMDFM introduced additional support for victims and survivors groups in the form of an Interim Capacity Fund. The purpose of this fund was to allow groups to continue important projects that had begun under PEACE II while the application process to PEACE III was taken forward.

Coastguard Service

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any correspondence they have exchanged in the last two years regarding the future of the Coastguard Service.

(AQW 255/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have taken a close interest in the Department of Transport's consultation on proposals for modernising the coastguard and, particularly, the implications for the Belfast Rescue Centre based in Bangor. Our visit to the Rescue Co-Ordination Centre at Bregenz House and the opportunity to talk to Vice Admiral Sir Alan Massey, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and the staff at the Centre was very informative.

We subsequently wrote to Mike Penning MP, the Under Secretary of State for Transport, enclosing our comprehensive response to the consultation. A further, more specific, submission was sent from the Civil Contingencies Group, a unit within OFMDFM responsible for co-ordinating strategic multi-agency civil contingencies in Northern Ireland. We also provided written evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee reinforcing our stance.

In addition, over the past few months we have corresponded on this issue with the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and with a number of local elected representatives.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Groups: Funding

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding that has been allocated by their Department to each lesbian, gay and bi-sexual group in each year since May 2007. **(AQW 291/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No money was allocated by OFMDFM since May 2007. The Department continued to administer a pre-devolution funding package which is now finished.

Smithwick Tribunal

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have made representations to the government of the Republic of Ireland regarding its intention to limit the Smithwick Tribunal; and if not, will they do so urgently.

(AQW 345/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have raised this issue with the Taoiseach, and the First Minister has raised the matter with the Irish Justice Minister.

Coastguard Service

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the discussions they have had with the British Government regarding the future of the Coastguard Service.

(AQW 460/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In response to the Department of Transport's consultation on proposals for modernising the coastguard, we wrote to Mike Penning MP, the Under Secretary of State for Transport, enclosing our comprehensive response on 3 March. Our submission outlined a comprehensive and detailed case for retaining the Belfast Rescue Centre at Bregenz House in Bangor.

A further submission was sent from the Civil Contingencies Group, which is a multi-agency group chaired by OFMDFM responsible for co-ordinating strategic civil contingencies arrangements in Northern Ireland. We also provided written evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee reinforcing our stance.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) whether their Department has engaged in any procurement single tender actions in the last 12 months, and why; and (ii) the scale of expenditure involved.

(AQW 476/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department has engaged in procurement via single tender actions in the twelve month period 1 June 2010 to 31 May 2011. The total value of contracts awarded through single tender action in this period is £131,679.

Single tender action was considered the most appropriate procurement method due to the specialised nature of the assignments being commissioned.

Bangor Coastguard Station

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the position in relation to Bangor Coastguard Station.

(AQW 479/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We await the outcome of the consultation on the Modernisation of Coastguard Services which the Department of Transport launched on 16 December 2010. The closing date of the consultation was 5 May 2011.

We responded to Mike Penning, Whitehall Minister for Transport, on 3 March, in which we supported the retention of a full-time coastguard presence here. The previous Minister for Regional Development and the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) also submitted responses to the consultation. In addition, we provided written evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee reinforcing our stance on 21 March 2011.

Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the discussions they have had with the British Government regarding the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

(AQW 491/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The suspension of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) has been a major concern for some time now, given the very damaging effect it is having on our local industry.

The Finance Minister has raised this issue with Treasury Ministers on several occasions since the EU Court decision last September, and stressed the need for an early replacement scheme most recently when he met the Economic Secretary, Justine Greening, on 16 March 2011. It was also raised during our meeting with the Chancellor on 17 June.

The Economic Secretary indicated at that meeting that the Treasury are committed to a new/replacement scheme and will work towards that goal as quickly as possible.

The European Commission are carrying out a full review of the scheme following the EU General Court decision. Officials from DFP and DOE are working with the Treasury to provide the Commission with the information it requires to complete this review as quickly as possible.

Commission for Victims and Survivors

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the review of the Commission for Victims and Survivors has been completed.

(AQW 549/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department commissioned KPMG to carry out the review. The review is ongoing.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what legislation their Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 643/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is not possible to be definitive at this time about whether the completion of current strands of policy development within OFMDFM will require the introduction of Bills in the Assembly and, if so, in which year of the mandate this will take place. This will be kept under review as work progresses.

We do, however, plan to introduce regulations in 2011/12 to amend the Race Relations Order 1997 in respect of differential rates of pay for seafarers recruited in different jurisdictions, and to introduce a statutory rule to update the list of bodies specified as public authorities for the purposes of the Fair Employment and Treatment legislation.

Any legislation brought forward will of course be subject to consultation with the OFMDFM Committee, and where appropriate, with Executive agreement.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 155/11-15, to detail (i) the subject matters on which the consultants were engaged; (ii) the consultants engaged; and (iii) the costs incurred on each project.

(AQW 697/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In response to AQW 155/11-15, we have provided details of total expenditure by OFMDFM and its Arms Length Bodies on the use of external consultants during the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2011. Full details of the subject matters on which external consultants were engaged, the consultants engaged, and the costs incurred on each project during this period have been placed in the Assembly Library.

St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department has any plans to preserve the front gates of the St Patrick's army base, Ballymena in any future development.

(AQW 712/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Under the 2010 Hillsborough Castle Agreement, this site has been transferred to the Executive to be sold. Plans for the disposal of the site are therefore being drawn up.

The Ministry of Defence advise that they are not aware of any special significance to the front gates. Regimental shield badges were removed from the gates by the MoD when the base was being decommissioned.

St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what military memorials are still in the St Patrick's army base in Ballymena; and what their Department plans to do with these artefacts.

(AQW 713/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We understand that the military memorials previously on the site of the former St Patrick's base in Ballymena were removed and relocated by the Ministry of Defence when the base was being decommissioned.

St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they can ensure that any future plans their Department has for (i) military memorials that may currently exist in St Patrick's Barracks; and (ii) the front gates of these barracks, will reflect the wishes of Ballymena residents, people who were based at the barracks and organisations who represent past and present servicemen and women.

(AQW 745/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Under the 2010 Hillsborough Castle Agreement, this site has been transferred to us for sale in order to provide funds for budget pressure within the Executive. Plans for the disposal of the site are therefore being drawn up.

We understand that the military memorials previously on the site of the former St Patrick's base in Ballymena were removed and relocated by the Ministry of Defence when the base was being decommissioned.

The MoD have told us that they are not aware of any special significance to the front gates. Regimental shield badges were also removed from the gates by the Ministry of Defence when the base was being decommissioned.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr A Maginness asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the delay in the allocation of funding to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund for the year 2011/12; and when the Trustees will be able to distribute the funding to successful applicants.

(AQW 757/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The application process for funding from NIMF closed on 18th April. The first phase of funding, totalling over £4 million, has already been delivered. The Department is working to ensure that all of the necessary financial approvals are in place to enable the second phase of funding to be delivered early next month.

Victims and Survivors' Groups

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the names of the victims and survivors groups which were subject to the recent risk based audits.

(AQW 782/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Whilst the audit is being carried out it would be inappropriate to identify any of the groups being investigated.

NI Water: Sir Jon Shortridge's Report

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when Sir Jon Shortridge's report on NI Water will be published.

(AQW 805/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Sir Jon Shortridge was not reporting on NI Water.

Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with HM Treasury regarding the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

(AQW 838/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The suspension of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) has been a major concern for some time now, given the very damaging effect it is having on our local industry.

The Finance Minister has raised this issue with Treasury Ministers on several occasions since the EU Court decision last September, and stressed the need for an early replacement scheme most recently when he met the Economic Secretary, Justine Greening, on 16 March 2011. It was also raised during our meeting with the Chancellor on 17 June.

The Economic Secretary indicated at that meeting that the Treasury are committed to a new/ replacement scheme and will work towards that goal as quickly as possible.

The European Commission are carrying out a full review of the scheme following the EU General Court decision. Officials from DFP and DOE are working with the Treasury to provide the Commission with the information it requires to complete this review as quickly as possible.

Coastguard Service: 24-hour Service

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with the Prime Minister regarding the retention of a 24-hour coastguard service in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 839/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have had no direct discussion with the Prime Minister regarding the retention of the 24-hour coastguard service in Bangor. During the “Modernisation of Coastguard Services” consultation period, we submitted a comprehensive response to Mike Penning MP, the Transport Minister, in which we made the case for retaining the service. We also provided written evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee reinforcing our stance.

We await the outcome of the consultation, which closed on 5 May 2011. The final decision is expected before the Westminster recess on 19 July.

Devolution of Further Functions to the Assembly and Executive

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the development of a Programme for Government for 2011-2015.

(AQW 840/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials, in consultation with departments, have been developing over the last number of months, a draft Programme for Government for the period 2011-2015.

Following a meeting of the Budget Review Group on 15 June 2011, it was agreed that we should issue a draft of the Programme for Government (2011-15) for consideration by Executive colleagues.

Devolution of Further Functions to the Assembly and Executive

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any discussions they have had with the Prime Minister, in the last twelve months, regarding the devolution of further functions to the Assembly and Executive.

(AQW 886/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have met the Prime Minister twice in the last twelve months and on both occasions we discussed the potential for the devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly for the setting of the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Food Standards Agency

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is seeking to recoup the full cost of its meat inspection controls, what plans her Department has in place to assist the farming industry; and for her assessment of the impact of the FSA's decision.

(AQW 502/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I am aware that the Food Standards Agency is proposing to introduce a full cost recovery system for meat hygiene inspections and understand industry concerns about the effect this will have on their costs. The costs of food safety controls imposed by the Food Standards Agency are for a service provided to the meat industry whose decision it is whether or not to pass any increase on to the farmer.

I intend to meet with the Food Standards Agency next week to discuss this issue and I will be making my position known to them.

Forest Land in the Mourne Mountains

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department intends to take in relation to the forest land in the Mourne Mountains that was recently damaged by fire; and whether there are any plans for the restoration of this area.

(AQW 527/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The forest fires have had an impact on many of our key stakeholders, including visitors to forests and forest parks seeking recreation and Local Councils with leisure and recreation interests. It is therefore imperative that action is taken to assess the damage caused by the fires which will inform further decisions on restoration of the affected areas. My Department is currently finalising work on surveying the extent of Forest Service woodland recently damaged by fire.

Our aim will be to achieve restoration of areas damaged by fire and this will be in line with Forest Management Plans which are in place for all woodlands managed by Forest Service. These plans set out the management objectives for individual forests ensuring an appropriate balance between social, environmental and economic benefits consistent with sustainable forest management principles.

Broadband for Rural Areas

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial assistance is available to enable farmers and rural dwellers to access broadband at a cost and speed which does not disadvantage them in comparison to other users; and to outline her plans to ensure that broadband is available to all rural dwellers within the next 12 months.

(AQW 580/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not offer any direct financial assistance to enable either farmers or rural dwellers to access broadband. However DARD has invested £2.5 million in the 'Next Generation Broadband' programme delivered on the ground by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This funding was specifically targeted at rural areas that did not have broadband or were running at lower speeds and I am confident this will have a positive impact on rural dwellers. My department is also represented on the DETI broadband project board, and I have asked my Officials to investigate all opportunities for increasing access to broadband in rural areas. I have said publically that access to broadband for rural dwellers is one of my priorities.

Brucellosis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have had their cattle herds destroyed as a direct result of the deliberate brucellosis infection in County Armagh; and where these affected farms are located.

(AQW 587/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the Lislea area, where the infected foetus was deliberately placed, 11 herds have been subject to depopulations. In the Keady area, where the brucellosis breakdowns are suspected to have initially begun as a result of illegal activity in cattle movements, there have been 17 herds depopulated. Not all of the above had infection in their herds but some were associated to infected herds.

It should be emphasised that there is no suspicion of non-compliance with disease control legislation in the majority of these herds.

Brucellosis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the farthest estimated distance of detected brucellosis infection from the original source of the deliberate infection in County Armagh; and what evidence was established showing that the cases were linked.

(AQW 590/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From early 2010 there have been two distinct clusters of breakdowns: one group in Lislea, in the Newry DVO area, the site of the infected foetus, and a second group in Keady, in the Armagh DVO area.

Although there is no firm evidence of direct physical connection between the two areas, both groups of outbreaks had the same *Brucella abortus* strain type. The farthest distance between the infections sharing the same strain type, where there is a potential link, is approximately 20 miles.

Brucellosis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been paid in compensation to farmers whose cattle have been culled due to the deliberate brucellosis infection in County Armagh; and how many farms this involves.

(AQW 592/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date the compensation paid to farmers in South Armagh following on from the discovery of the dumped infected foetus in late 2009 has been £857, 573.

In addition a number of herd owners have had their herds valued and removed but have had compensation withheld pending investigations into non-compliance issues. Their combined value is £808, 375.

The total number of herds involved is 30. Not all of these herds had reactors themselves. Some were closely associated to reactor herds and had cattle culled because of the high risk of exposure to brucellosis.

DARD: Direct Offices

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number and location of the DARD Direct offices that have opened since 2006; and (ii) the number and location of DARD Direct offices that are planned for the future.

(AQW 600/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My predecessor Michelle Gildernew MP MLA announced there would be a network of 12 DARD Direct Offices across the north of Ireland. Since 2006 we have fully refurbished DARD Direct offices in Enniskillen, Coleraine, Dungannon, Newry and Mallusk. Offices at Downpatrick and Magherafelt are in the final stages of development and should be completed and fully operational by mid-July.

The remaining locations identified for DARD Direct offices are Armagh, Ballymena, Claudy, Newtownards and Omagh. Funding to continue the roll-out was secured in the current CSR period. I am hopeful that a fully operational DARD Direct office in Armagh and one other location will be delivered in this financial year. This is subject to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) securing and developing suitable premises. Beyond this, we will continue to work with DFP to secure and refurbish properties at the remaining locations, giving due care to the need to deliver value for money.

Rural Development Programme: Axis 3

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding has been distributed under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme; and how much has been spent on administering the Programme to date.

(AQW 651/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date £28m has been committed to Projects by way of Letter of Offer and 171 of these projects have been completed. The figure for administration of the programme is £5m, which is made up of staff costs for 7 Local Action Groups (LAGs), office equipment and the work done throughout the north to produce important local strategies for the Programme, stakeholder consultation and information.

A further £8m of Letters of Offer are being prepared to issue to applicants shortly. I am happy to report also that another £48m of applications are actively being assessed currently by LAGs.

This means that at the half way point in the Programme, £84m of applications have either been turned into investments within the rural community or are being worked through by the LAG members who continue to make decisions about how best these funds can benefit their areas.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation her Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 690/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Proposals for primary legislation are currently being developed to regulate reservoir safety and for a range of subordinate legislation to give effect to provisions in the Forestry Act (NI) 2010, the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 and the Dogs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011. Proposals are also being developed for subordinate legislation to give effect to provisions relating to Loughs Agency functions in respect of the Foyle and Carlingford areas and to transpose various EU Directives relating to animal and plant health, animal welfare, marketing of agricultural produce and products, and fisheries and aquaculture. These proposals are subject to consultation with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and where appropriate, to Executive agreement. Further legislative proposals will be brought forward during 2011/12 and the following years of the mandate, to give effect to new, or changes to existing policies.

Decentralisation of Headquarters

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's position on the possible decentralisation of its headquarters to the Loughry College site.

(AQW 747/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has been taken yet on where the proposed new DARD HQ will be located. The details about location and configuration of the new HQ have yet to be determined. These and other matters will be for a project team to consider and address at the appropriate time. The project will be subject to the Executive's usual requirements in respect of business cases and procurement. However, the Bain Report recommended that the new DARD HQ should be relocated to a rural area outside of Greater Belfast.

Forests

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many acres of forest is privately owned; and how many acres are owned by Forest Service NI.

(AQW 770/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The published figures indicate that for the year 2010/2011, the total area of Forest Service managed woodland is 61,040 hectares (150,769 acres) and the total area of privately owned forest is 26,917 hectares (66,485 acres).

You will wish to note that Forest Service is currently carrying out work to establish baseline data of woodland cover and type in the north of Ireland, using other available woodland information, to provide more comprehensive data.

Fish Stocks

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what meetings she has held with fish producers in advance of the annual negotiations for the new levels of Total Allowable Catch for fish stocks; and if such meetings took place, what issues were discussed.

(AQW 841/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There has been no discussion on this matter yet because the scientific advice from ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) will not be published until 29 June. When that is analysed and considered in conjunction with the Commission's policy statement on fishing opportunities we will have an insight into what the Commission is likely to propose by way of TACs for 2012. As always the Nephrops TAC for Area VII is likely to be a key priority and I will be keen to meet with stakeholder representatives to discuss this and other TACs of interest in due course. I shall be visiting Kilkeel before the end of June when I will have an opportunity to discuss a range of issues with representatives from the fishing industry.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that she, or her predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 898/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since May 2007, either I or my predecessor as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:-

PLENARY MEETINGS

Date	Minister
17 July 2007	Michelle Gildernew
7 February 2008	Michelle Gildernew
23 January 2009	Michelle Gildernew
6 July 2009	Michelle Gildernew
5 July 2010	Michelle Gildernew
21 January 2011	Michelle Gildernew
19 June 2011	Michelle O'Neill

SECTORAL MEETINGS

Date	Sectoral	Minister
9 November 2007	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
21 November 2007	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
30 April 2008	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
21 May 2008	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
26 June 2008	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
20 March 2009	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
30 April 2009	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew

Date	Sectoral	Minister
20 July 2009	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
21 July 2009	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
18 November 2009	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
18 November 2009	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
31 March 2010	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew
31 March 2010	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
9 September 2010	Aquaculture & Marine	Michelle Gildernew
31 October 2010	Agriculture	Michelle Gildernew

Michelle Gildernew also attended the following NSMC meetings:-

Date	Sectoral
8 November 2007	Tourism
28 November 2007	Health & Food Safety
28 May 2008	Health & Food Safety
29 May 2008	Tourism
29 May 2008	Trade & Business Development
16 January 2009	Language
16 January 2009	Inland Waterways
1 April 2009	Tourism
10 June 2009	Health & Food Safety
25 November 2009	Health & Food Safety
2 June 2010	Health & Food Safety
10 November 2010	Health & Food Safety

In relation to the other aspects of your question, following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website (www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org). Also, after each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website

(<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/hansard.htm>).

The North South Ministerial Council provides an important forum for the development of co-operation and action on matters of mutual interest. Examples of the outcomes and achievements include:

Animal Health

There have been a number of very positive developments on Animal Health and Welfare including the development of a common chapter in contingency plans for Foot and Mouth Disease, Bluetongue and Avian Influenza. We are also working together to secure freedom from Aujeszky's Disease on the island of Ireland.

Mutual Recognition of Ram Genotyping Schemes both north and south was achieved in October 2010.

Electronic Identification (EID) system for Sheep was implemented during 2010 following close co-operation north and south. I am pleased that officials will consider the impact of forthcoming Commission EID proposals on cattle EID jointly.

We have recently identified how data on animal movements can be better shared and significant progress is being made in this area.

Close liaison is on-going in relation to the Commission's developing proposals for a new EU Animal Health law.

There has recently been agreement of a protocol on welfare of animals during transport breaches and work in this area is progressing well.

Plant Health

A comprehensive report on a joint strategic approach to plant health and pesticide matters has been produced and a work programme will be presented at the next meeting of the NSMC.

CAP and WTO

The discussions at the NSMC on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations have enabled DARD and DAFF to keep abreast of each others positions and generally there is a large measure of agreement. A satisfactory outcome to the EU CAP Health Check negotiations was achieved in 2008 and I intend to continue discussions on the CAP at future NSMC meetings given the upcoming CAP reform negotiations at EU level.

Rural Development

Achievements in North South co-operation in relation to Rural Development include progress on the opening of a Rural Development sub-theme on EU INTERREG IVA and endorsement of a PEACE III project aimed at addressing sectarianism and racism in a rural context.

Aquaculture

In the Aquaculture and Marine sector, the NSMC approves the Corporate and Business Plans for the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The NSMC has given approval for a significant number of Regulations to ensure conservation and protection of the fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas (which have included the introduction of controls and licensing of the wild oyster fishery in Lough Foyle); a hardship scheme for the rationalisation of commercial salmon fishing to ensure conservation and protection of declining salmon stocks; and a Marine Tourism Strategy for the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

Partnerships on marine tourism have been developed between the Loughs Agency and other agencies north and south. Delivery of a €4m euro funding package covering marine tourism, water based leisure and angling development, has begun, including major projects on the river Foyle which were critical in attracting the Clipper Round the World yacht race in 2012. Other tourism projects are being developed throughout the two catchments, including along the Mourne Coastal Route and in Omeath.

Disease Compensation Arrangements

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the submissions to the consultation on the proposed new disease compensation arrangements will be published.

(AQW 910/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials are due to brief the ARD Committee on the responses to the public consultation on proposals for revised compensation arrangements for TB and brucellosis at its meeting on 28 June 2011. Copies of the consultation responses will be provided to the Committee in advance of this date. A summary of the responses will be published on the DARD website immediately following the meeting.

Rural Development Programme: Axis 3

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how much funding her Department allocated to the Axis 3 Rural Development Programme in each financial year for the period 2007 to 2012; (ii) how much of this money has been spent; (iii) on what projects it has been spent; and (iv) what happened to the funds that were not allocated to projects.

(AQW 1010/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Axis 3 allocations from 2007-08 to 2011-12
- | | |
|---------|--------|
| 2007-08 | £0.07m |
| 2008-09 | £1.00m |
| 2009-10 | £5.4 m |
| 2010-11 | £14.8m |
| 2011-12 | £24.5m |
- (ii) Axis 3 spend from 2007-08 to 2011-12
- | | |
|---------|---|
| 2007-08 | £0.07m |
| 2008-09 | £0.76m |
| 2009-10 | £3.7m |
| 2010-11 | £10.3m |
| 2011-12 | £0.5m (end May 2011 / first 2 months of the financial year) |
- (iii) To be able to list spend on 170 completed projects and include the phased payments in relation to many more projects would be impractical in this reply so I am interpreting your question as meaning what measures has the funding been spent on. Funding has been spent across all the measures (see below) with the highest spend on measures 3.1 – 3.3.
- Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification
 - Measure 3.2 Micro business Creation and development
 - Measure 3.3 Tourism
 - Measure 3.4 Basic Services
 - Measure 3.5 Village Renewal
 - Measure 3.6 Cultural Heritage
- (iv) If spend within a financial year is not realised within one area of the NIRDP it can be reallocated to other measures.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the relocation of her Department's headquarters.

(AQO 127/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The DARD HQ relocation project began in earnest in March 2011. A Project Team, established by the DARD Permanent Secretary as a Committee of the Departmental Board, met on four occasions and has agreed a scoping paper which outlines the considerations necessary to progress the project. The paper covers issues such as policy context, project management, equality screening and human resource issues.

The Department has recently appointed a Project Manager to work full time on this project, initially to develop a more detailed Strategic Outline Case - a necessary component in a project of this scale. In moving forward with this important project DARD will continue to work closely with key stakeholders including NI Public Service Alliance and Department of Finance and Personnel.

Programme for Government

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she intends to publish her Department's plans and priorities for inclusion in the next Programme for Government.

(AQO 125/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: OFMDFM is in the lead in developing a new Programme for Government (PfG) for the period 2011-15. Work on this is underway and it is intended that the new PfG will build on the achievements of the last programme.

At present the First Minister and deputy First Minister are considering all aspects of the new Programme including structure, content and timetable. In due course, the Executive as a whole will wish to consider the shape, size and content of a draft PfG.

DARD input has been provided to the draft PfG in respect of key objectives and potential performance indicators for the four year period, along with a range of comments on the structure and content of the draft. It is too early to say precisely when the Executive will be in a position to approve and publish a draft PfG.

DARD has, in parallel with development of the draft PfG, taken forward work to develop a new Strategic Plan and 2011/12 Annual Business Plan.

Work in relation to the development of the Department's new Strategic Plan, to cover the period 2011-20, is ongoing. This includes senior management consideration of the DARD Vision, Aim, Role and the Strategic Goals and Objectives for the period in question.

As the 2011/12 business year is already underway, a draft Business Plan for the year has been developed and it is intended to present this to the ARD Committee for consideration.

As the new DARD Strategic Plan and Annual Business Plan are developed, revisions to the Department's input to the draft PfG will be inserted as appropriate.

Both the new DARD Strategic Plan and the Annual Business Plan (2011/12) will be published as soon as possible, taking account of developments in regard to the PfG.

Food: Marketing

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of how marketing our food products on an all-island basis might benefit the agri-food sector and local farmers. **(AQO 126/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: From the outset, I want to make clear that food labelling in the north of Ireland is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency, via the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Nevertheless, as DARD Minister, I am keen that the agri-food sector takes all opportunities to support its expansion on the global stage.

The north is fortunate to be a net exporter, and so its products are sold in a wide range of markets and branding is tailored for specific markets in a manner that optimises benefit to the industry. I welcome the important trade in food products here and the South and consider that we should foster a joint approach to the marketing of products from the island of Ireland which I believe would benefit all farmers.

I raised this when I met recently with my southern counterpart, Simon Coveney TD, and intend to discuss this further with him as our agri-food sectors share many of the same global challenges, north and south.

Broadband: Rural Areas

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will work with other Departments and agencies to improve rural broadband coverage. **(AQO 128/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: As you know I have made access to rural broadband one of my key priorities. To date my department has invested two lots of funding in broadband under the Rural Development Programme, £1.5 million under the European Union Economic recovery funds and secondly £1 million under the Anti Poverty Programme. The funds invested were delivered on the ground by the Department of

Enterprise Trade and Investment through the Next Generation Broadband programme. This investment has attracted private match funding in excess of £2.5 million enabling over £5 million to be targeted specifically at rural areas.

Officials from my department sit on the DETI project board and we liaise closely with them as regards future programmes and investment in rural broadband. It is my view that no rural dweller should be disadvantaged because of lack of access to broadband and I will continue to press for greater access in rural areas and work proactively to ensure this.

Common Agricultural Policy: Greening

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she will ensure that additional 'greening' actions, particularly those in relation to the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, will not have an adverse effect on farm incomes.

(AQO 129/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU Commission is advocating a greening component for the CAP Pillar 1. So far the ideas it has put forward have been at a high level and until the detail is published it is difficult to assess the potential impact on farm incomes. However, I am mindful of the risk that additional greening actions may impose unreasonable costs on farmers as well as a significant administrative burden. Therefore, I will be pushing strongly for these issues to be given careful consideration, alongside the potential environmental benefits that a greening component might deliver, during the CAP reform negotiations. It will be important that a balanced view is taken in relation to any additional greening actions.

Foyle: Marine Tourism

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how the Loughs Agency intends to promote and facilitate marine tourism on the Foyle catchment, particularly in the lead up to 2013.

(AQO 130/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency has engaged with Derry City Council and Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners to provide crucial infrastructure in the form of moorings and pontoon facilities in the city centre for the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in 2012 and City of Culture in 2013 and beyond.

The investment, funded through the INTERREG IV Programme by the Special EU Programmes Body, is part of the Agency's wider €4m programme for the Foyle and Carlingford areas which will have lasting impact on tourism in the North West and beyond.

The Loughs Agency is also partnered with Derry City and Convention Bureau and Londonderry Port and Harbour on the 'Cruise North West Initiative' which has developed promotional literature and attends trades sales shows annually to promote the Foyle as a destination for cruise vessels.

Later in 2011 the Agency hopes to re-launch its small grants scheme, the Sustainable Development Fund, which will allow stakeholders to access financial support for the promotion and development of tourism in the North West.

In addition, following the development of the Riverwatch Aquarium Phase 3, which was co-funded by NI Tourist board, the Agency has this year welcomed the 100,000th visitor to the facility, with both local people and tourists making use of the visitor's centre and education programmes.

Common Agricultural Policy: Consultation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the consultation on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will commence.

(AQO 133/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department carried out a consultation on the CAP Reform Communication paper which was issued by the EU Commission on 18 November 2010. This consultation was launched on

17 December 2010 and ended on 31 January 2011. The responses received were used to inform the Department's response to the Commission paper which was presented to the Commission on 24 March 2011. Formal CAP reform legislative proposals are expected to be published by the Commission in October 2011 and I intend to launch a further local consultation shortly after their publication.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Departmental Documentation

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has requested that her staff undertake a review of all departmental documentation to remove references to either 'Northern Ireland' or the 'United Kingdom'.

(AQW 550/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I have not requested DCAL staff to undertake any such review.

Meetings with Organisations

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the organisations that have requested meetings with her since she took up office; and the organisations she has agreed to meet.

(AQW 658/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my appointment as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I have received requests for meetings from the following organisations;

Organisation

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Cycling Ulster | ■ Newry and Mourne Famine Commemoration |
| ■ Government Action for Our Urban Environment | ■ Ardoyne Youth Club |
| ■ Shared History Interpretive Project | ■ Older People's Advocate |
| ■ Cinemagic | ■ Big Lottery Fund |
| ■ POBAL | ■ Save Gilford Library Campaign |
| ■ Lough Erne Eel Fishermen | ■ Athletics NI |
| ■ NI Screen | ■ Ulster Sports Museum |
| ■ Newington FC | ■ Shakespeare United |
| ■ National Trust | ■ Fuel Poverty Coalition |
| ■ Gaelgoiri na Chuirte | ■ Park Giants Sports Village |
| ■ Irish Pages | ■ Ulster Council of the GAA |
| ■ NI Commissioner for Children and Young People | ■ Conradh na Gaeilge |
| ■ Cross Border Orchestra for Ireland | ■ Culturlann Ui Chanain |
| ■ Foras na Gaeilge | ■ Audiences NI |
| ■ Aisling Ghear Theatre Company | ■ Greater Shantallow Arts Community |
| ■ CBI | ■ Ballymurphy Massacre Committee |
| ■ Toccata | ■ Down District Council |
| ■ Arts and Disability Equality Charter | ■ Arts and Public Space |
| ■ Culturlann | ■ Artability |
| ■ Cow Parade | ■ Ulster Rugby |
| ■ Sport and Recreation Alliance | ■ Heritage Lottery Fund |
| ■ British Council in NI | ■ CPANI |
| | ■ Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann |

- Child Development through Sport
- Participation and Practice of Rights
- NIPSA
- Communities Against Lough Neagh Incinerator

Further to this I have agreed to meet with the following organisations:

Organisation

- Shared History Interpretive Project
- Cinemagic
- POBAL
- Lough Erne Eel Fishermen
- NI Screen
- Newington FC
- NI Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Aisling Ghear Theatre Company
- CBI
- Arts and Disability Equality Charter
- Culturlann
- Cow Parade
- Sport and Recreation Alliance
- British Council in NI
- Ardoyne Youth Club
- Older People's Advocate
- Big Lottery Fund
- Athletics NI
- Ulster Council of the GAA
- Conradh na Gaeilge
- Culturlann Ui Chanain
- Audiences NI
- Greater Shantallow Arts Community
- Ballymurphy Massacre Committee
- Down District Council
- Artability
- Ulster Rugby
- Heritage Lottery Fund

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what legislation her Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 691/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I intend to bring forward proposals for legislation for an Irish Language Act to meet the commitment in the St Andrews Agreement. I am in the process of establishing a timeframe for this task.

My Department also intends to introduce the following subordinate legislation in 2011/12 and the following years of this mandate:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Fisheries Amendment Regulations | - | 1 October 2011; |
| Eel Fishing Amendment Regulations | - | 1 October 2011; and |
| Public Use of the Records | - | Proposed amendment 2015 |
| (Management and Fees) Rules | | |

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 157/11-15, to detail (i) the subject matters on which the consultants were engaged; (ii) the consultants engaged; and (iii) the costs incurred on each project.

(AQW 698/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The tables on the following pages (split by financial year) provide the requested information. Please note that the 2010-11 figures vary slightly from the value reported in AQW 157/11-15. This is due to a reclassification of expenditure following preparation of the Department's Resource Accounts for the year.

2007-08

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Adventure Activities Associates	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulation	12,701
Beeches Management Centre	Advice on Competence Based Training	990
Bernard McCloskey QC	Legal Advice to Minister iro Board Membership	850
Cadan Solutions	Electronic Catalogue for Northern Ireland Project	18,025
CAPITA Resourcing	Recruitment of Chief Executive Designate for NI Library Authority	2,470
CILIP	Interview Panel Member for Recruitment of Chief Executive Designate for NI Library Authority	530
CIPFA	Review of Governance in Arms Length Bodies	27,000
Central Procurement Directorate	Elite Facilities Programme – Advice	1,302
Central Procurement Directorate	Article 4 & 10 Site Visits	6,195
David Gibson	Corporate Governance of Ulster Scots Agency	4,139
Dept of Employment & Learning	Investors in People Review	1,050
Deloitte	Options for Corporate Services of NI Library Authority	53,525
Deloitte	Interim Performance Evaluation of Irish Language Broadcast Fund	12,716
Deloitte & Touche	Accountancy Services	4,013
Deloitte MCS Ltd	Review of Arts Council/Sport NI operating costs	14,464
Denton Wilde Sapte	IFA/Linfield Contract – legal advice	32,062
Dept of Education	Internal Audit	67,227
Departmental Solicitors Office	Title Deeds	5
Derek Evans/QUB	Eel Research Project	53,000
Donal O'Riagain	Specialist Advice on European Charter	842
Evolve Business Consultants	Business Continuity Plan	29,826
Fire IMC	Naming Rights – Multi Sports Stadium	10,374
Goldblatt McGuigan	Facilities Management Business Case	22,345
GSL UK Ltd	Chartermark Assessment	740
Helm Corporation	Asset Title Project	47,657
Joan Ruddock	Sport NI Chair/Vice-Chair Appointments	2,927
Julia Bracewell	Sport NI Board Appointments	274

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Kentwood Associates	Transitional HR Support and Advice	6,423
KPMG	IFA/Linfield Contract – financial advice	20,120
KPMG/Davis Langdon	Programme Management – Multi Sports Stadium	181,302
KPMG/John Caldwell	Consultancy Assignment – NI Events Company	89,509
Mazars	Financial Audit – Foras na Gaeilge	2,133
Miller Partnership	Facilities Audit – Windsor Park	24,659
Mott MacDonald	Design – Multi Sports Stadium	2,417,634
Orla Moore	NI Events Company Board Appointments	437
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Business Planning – Multi Sports Stadium	196,935
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	VALCAL – Value of Culture, Arts & Leisure	25,703
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	PRONI Review	6,359
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Job Description for Head of Division	950
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	W5 Strategic Plan	52,387
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Social & Economic Impact of Recreation Fisheries, Angling & Angling Resources in NI	-2,628 #
	Total	£3,449,172

negative contract expenditure due to contribution received from North South body in respect of expenditure incurred in 2006-07.

2008-09

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
APEM Ltd	Fishing Consultancy Services	9,975
Cadan Solutions	Electronic Catalogue for Northern Ireland Project	11,025
CIPFA	Review of Governance in Arms Length Bodies	24,150
Deloitte MCS Ltd	Refresh of Business Case/Economic Appraisal for Ulster Scots Academy	21,038
Dept of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	Ulster Canal Outline Business Case	12,804
Donal O'Riagain	Specialist Advice on European Charter	1,064
FGS McClure Watters	Review of Sport NI	11,200
Finegan Gibson	Review of NI Events Company financial transactions	6,055
Goldblatt McGuigan	Facilities Management Business Case	8,895
GSL UK Ltd	Chartermark	790
John Hunter	Advice – NI Events Company	600

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
KPMG	Establishment of Navigation Authority for Lough Neagh	45,802
KPMG/Davis Langdon	Multi Sports Stadium	17,943
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Briefing with Minister – Multi Sports Stadium	1,491
	Total	£172,832

2009-10

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Cybertrust UK Ltd	Security Check of Street Directories web application	1,000
Deafworks	Direction of Sign Language Partnership Group	6,792
Digital Assurance	IT Health Check on CALM System	3,875
FGS McClure Watters	Irish Language Broadcast Fund Post Project Evaluation	14,527
Goldblatt McGuigan	Digital Preservation Business Case	16,320
KPMG	Review of Payments made under Water Based Tourism Project	18,846
Mr D Howard	Office of Commissioner of Public Appointments assessor – NI Library Authority board appointments	1,268
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Libraries NI Senior Management Pay Review	9,337
Tandem Design	A Century of Change Exhibition – Phase 1 Design	5,564
	Total	£77,529

2010-11

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
BWMC Ltd	Toolkit for Marching Bands	15,926
Deloitte	Refresh of Ulster Scots Academy Business Case	12,596
Electric Cat Ltd	IT Health Check of CALM & Public Internet systems	4,180
Goldblatt McGuigan	Digital Preservation Business Case	4,080
Tandem Design	A Century of Change Exhibition – Phase 1 Design	16,692
Valerie Adams	Ulster Scots Archivist Project	1,200
	Total	£54,674 *

* varies by £863 from figure reported in AQW 157/11-15 due to reclassification of expenditure in 2010-11 Resource Accounts

Olympics: Pre-Olympic Training Camps

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which sporting venues are being promoted as potential venues for pre-Olympic training camps.

(AQW 701/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Twenty-six facilities have been approved by the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) as Olympic standard training facilities. They are included in the London 2012 official Pre Games Training Camp (PGTC) Guide which includes all sporting venues across the UK.

SportNI has promoted the 26 approved venues since the Handover in Beijing in 2008, and continues to promote them at every opportunity. However, facilities at Bangor Castle Leisure Centre are no longer being promoted as the 50 metre pool will not be completed in time.

SportNI has promotional materials available, including a brochure on Pre Games Training in Northern Ireland and a DVD.

The twenty six LOCOG approved venues in Northern Ireland are:

- 1 Andersonstown Leisure Centre and Holy Trinity Amateur Boxing Club
- 2 Antrim Forum and Antrim Stadium
- 3 Ballyholme Yacht Club
- 4 Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club (in conjunction with Banbridge Leisure Centre)
- 5 Bangor Castle Leisure Centre
- 6 Bangor Sportsplex
- 7 The Boy's Brigade Training Camp at Ganaway
- 8 Carrickfergus Sailing Club
- 9 Carlingford Lough Yacht Club
10. Glengormley Amateur Boxing Club
11. Glentoran Football Club, The Oval, in partnership with Ashfield Boys School and Avoniel Leisure Centre
12. Grosvenor Grammar School
13. Grove Wellbeing Centre
14. Lisnagarvey Hockey Club
15. Mary Peters Track
16. Mid Ulster Sports Arena
17. Monkstown Boxing and Community Sports Association
18. National Badminton Centre (Lisburn Racquets)
19. North West Regional Sports Campus
20. NI Civil Service Sports Association
21. Olympia Leisure Centre and Windsor Park
22. Portmore International Equestrian Centre
23. Queen's University Belfast
24. Salto Gymnastics Centre
25. Ulster Lakeland Equestrian Park at Necarne
26. University of Ulster

Capital Investment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the capital investment her Department and its agencies are planning for (i) facilities to improve participation in sport; and (ii) improvements to spectator facilities at sports venues, over the next four years.

(AQW 703/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the next four years my Department is planning capital investment for facilities to improve participation in sport and for improvements to spectator facilities, as shown in the tables below.

(i) Facilities to improve participation in sport

Programme/Project	Planned Investment
Sport Matters Community Capital Programme	£2.25m
Sport Matters Community Capital Programme – Invest to Save	£8m
50 Metre Pool (completion of project begun before 2011/12)	£11.621m
Building Sport Programme (completion of projects begun before 2011/12)	£0.566m
Mourne Mountain Bike Track	£0.15m

(ii) Improvements to spectator facilities at sports venues

Programme Project	Planned Investment
Regional Stadiums Development (Casement Park, Windsor Park and Ravenhill)	£110m
Stadia Safety Programme (completion of projects begun before 2011/12)	£0.536m

Waterways Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has allocated to Waterways Ireland in each year since 1998.

(AQW 729/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Waterways Ireland (WI) is funded jointly by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The WI financial year is based on a calendar year (Jan-Dec). The agreed budget for the DCAL contribution is allocated over an April to March financial year. The funding allocated by DCAL to WI since 1998 is set out in the following table.

FUNDING TO WATERWAYS IRELAND

Financial Year April to March	DCAL allocation £m
2000/01	1.30
2001/02	1.93
2002/03	2.33
2003/04	3.15
2004/05	4.55

Financial Year April to March	DCAL allocation £m
2005/06	3.50
2006/07	5.78
2007/08	8.20
2008/09	7.32
2009/10	5.36
2010/11	4.96

The increase in expenditure from 2006 to 2009 reflects increased capital costs for work on the navigations and the development of the new WI Headquarters in Enniskillen.

Olympics: Venue for the Olympic Flame

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would lobby the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to include Dervock as a venue for the Olympic Flame to visit in recognition of Kennedy Kane McArthur's achievement in the 1912 Olympics and of the work that Dervock Community Association has done to acknowledge the achievement.

(AQW 758/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has been working closely with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) in relation to the Torch Relay. Consultation was carried out in January 2010 and all 26 councils in the North of Ireland completed questionnaires to help identify the areas, organisations, projects and events that the Torch might visit. Via this questionnaire, representatives from Ballymoney District Council recommended that the Torch travel through Dervock.

A Torch Relay Advisory Group was then set up in the North of Ireland to provide advice and guidance to LOCOG, with representation from key stakeholders including the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. Recommendations were made to LOCOG via this group that the Torch should visit Dervock.

The previous Minister also personally recommended to LOCOG that the Torch visit Dervock in light of the centenary of Kenny Kane McArthur's Olympic victory.

LOCOG has now announced the dates that the Torch will visit the North of Ireland, and the locations for the evening celebrations. A more detailed route announcement will be made later this year. A seminar with Local Authorities was held on 13 June in Belfast to help them begin to consider how to engage with the communities on route so they might best exploit the opportunities available. Representatives from Ballymoney District Council attended this seminar.

My officials have also been working with the Dervock District and Community Association to help them ensure that they can avail of a number of opportunities, including London 2012 Open Weekend and the Inspire Programme.

I have also agreed to meet with Mervyn Storey to discuss plans to celebrate the centenary of Kennedy Kane McArthur's Olympic victory.

Olympics 2012

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how much her Department and its arm's-length bodies have spent on trying to attract Olympic Games teams to use Northern Ireland as a base for the 2012 Olympics; and (ii) for her assessment of whether value for money has been achieved.

(AQW 759/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: On approval of a business case from SportNI, DCAL agreed to provide funding to attract Olympic and Paralympic teams to use venues in the North of Ireland as a training base for the 2012 Games. To date a total of £182,000 has been spent.

It is expected that SportNI will welcome over 60 Olympic or Paralympic teams to NI in 2011 and 2012 for pre Games training camps or to compete in qualifying competitions, representing almost 1000 international athletes.

Two qualifying competitions have already been announced. The first will see 33 Countries competing in the CP ISRA Boccia World Cup in August 2011 at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. The second is the Yonex Irish International Badminton Championships in December 2011 at Lisburn Racquets Club.

In accordance with Government accounting procedures an evaluation will be carried out at the end of the project in 2012. Assessment on value for money is an integral part of this process.

Ulster-Scots Academy: Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will meet with the Ministerial Advisory Group for the Ulster-Scots Academy; and whether she will take its advice on the production of a strategy to support the development of the Ulster-Scots sector.

(AQW 762/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have arranged to meet with Dr Bill Smith the Chair of the Ulster-Scots Academy Ministerial Advisory Group on 20th July 2011 and I look forward to receiving in due course a strategy on the way forward for the Ulster-Scots sector.

2013 World Police and Fire Games

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans are currently in place for the 2013 World Police and Fire Games which will be held in Belfast.

(AQW 832/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A Company Limited by Guarantee known as '2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited' has been established by my Department to deliver the Games in Belfast in 2013. The Company was registered in Companies House on 28 February 2011.

The NI Executive has allocated £6.04m to the Games. A Chairman and Board of Directors have been appointed to the Company and following a trawl a Chief Executive Officer has been appointed.

While my Department retains sponsorship and accountability responsibilities for the Company it is up to the Board and the Chief Executive to put in place the necessary plans and arrangements to ensure the successful delivery of the Games between 1 and 10 August 2013.

I understand that significant progress has already been made on a number of critical work strands including sports events and venues, transport, volunteering and ceremonies.

I am fully committed to the delivery of the Games and wish the Company well in its endeavours to host a world class event in Belfast.

Regeneration of Craigavon House, Belfast

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 551/11-15, for her assessment of the cultural and historical importance of the regeneration of Craigavon House; and whether her Department would be in a position to provide funding for its regeneration.

(AQW 863/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Craigavon House has been the setting for a number of political and social events in our history, principally in the decade after 1912, and I fully appreciate its importance to some within our community.

Responsibility for the regeneration of Craigavon House rests with the Somme Association. My Department is not in a position to provide funding for its regeneration.

Reservoirs in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which reservoirs in North Down are owned by her Department.

(AQW 896/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not own any reservoirs in North Down.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that she, or her predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 899/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since May 2007, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:

Date	Sector	DCAL Minister	Accompanying Minister	Irish Minister
17 Jul 2007	Plenary	Minister Poots	All Ministers	All Ministers
17 Oct 2007	Waterways	Minister Poots	Minister Murphy	Éamon Ó Cuív
26 Oct 2007	Language	Minister Poots	Minister Ruane	Éamon Ó Cuív
07 Feb 2008	Plenary	Minister Poots	All Ministers	Éamon Ó Cuív
04 Jul 2008	Language	Minister Campbell	Minister Murphy	Éamon Ó Cuív
04 Jul 2008	Waterways	Minister Campbell	Minister Murphy	Éamon Ó Cuív
16 Jan 2009	Language	Minister Campbell	Minister Gildernew	Éamon Ó Cuív
16 Jan 2009	Waterways	Minister Campbell	Minister Gildernew	Éamon Ó Cuív
23 Jan 2009	Plenary	Minister Campbell	All Ministers	All Ministers
09 Jul 2009	Language	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Éamon Ó Cuív
09 Jul 2009	Waterways	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Éamon Ó Cuív
02 Dec 2009	Language	Minister McCausland	Minister Murphy	Éamon Ó Cuív
02 Dec 2009	Waterways	Minister McCausland	Minister Murphy	Éamon Ó Cuív
26 May 2010	Language	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Pat Carey
26 May 2010	Waterways	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Pat Carey
05 Jul 2010	Plenary	Minister McCausland	All Ministers	All Ministers
03 Nov 2010	Language	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Éamon Ó Cuív
03 Nov 2010	Waterways	Minister McCausland	Minister Ruane	Pat Carey
21 Jan 2011	Plenary	Minister McCausland	All Ministers	All Ministers
10 Jun 2011	Plenary	Minister Ní Chuilín	All Ministers	All Ministers

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Ulster Solemn League and Covenant

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has been in contact with the Ulster Centenary Committee regarding events planned to mark the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant; and whether she has directed that these events receive support.

(AQW 930/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my appointment as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I have received no correspondence from the Ulster Centenary Committee, nor have I issued any correspondence to them. I have issued no direction to my officials in relation to the events referred to.

However, the Ulster Centenary Committee may wish to consider applying for funding through existing programmes and initiatives delivered by my Department's Arms Length Bodies.

Arts Council's Re-imagining Communities Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which areas have received funding through the Arts Council's Re-imagining Communities Programme.

(AQW 1019/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All council areas, except Omagh and Strabane, have received funding through the Arts Council's Re-imagining Communities Programme. A total of 155 projects have received funding.

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) who has been responsible for the leadership of Libraries NI in the absence of the appointed Board since the election on 5 May 2011; and (ii) if Libraries NI has held any meetings since 5 May 2011, what items were on the agenda and what decisions were made.

(AQW 1021/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Board of Libraries NI has continued to operate in the absence of Councillor members, since there are eight members of the Board still in place.

The Libraries NI Board usually consists of 19 members, 11 of which are Councillors.

In accordance with their Terms & Conditions of Appointment the tenure of the Councillors on the Board ended at the date of the Council Elections on 5th May 2011.

The Board met on Wednesday 25 May 2011. The Agenda for the meeting is attached at Annex A. There were 7 members present.

The minutes of the meeting will be published on the Libraries NI website once they have been approved at the next Board meeting which is scheduled for 7 July 2011.

Annex A

LIBRARIES NI
The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Board Meeting

Wednesday 25 May 2011 10.30am in Lisburn City Library

AGENDA

1.	Apologies	
2.	Declaration of Interests	
3.	Chairperson's Business	
4.	Chief Executive's Business	
5.	Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 14 April 2011	LNI 01.05.11
6.	Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 14 April 2011	LNI 02.05.11
7.	Minutes of the Information Systems Committee held on 14 April 2011	LNI 03.05.11
8.	Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 18 May 2011	LNI 04.05.11 (to follow)
9.	Business Plan 2010/11: Report on Outcomes	LNI 05.05.11
10.	PSA Targets 2008 - 2011: Report on Outcomes in 2010/11	LNI 06.05.11
11.	Budget 2011/12	LNI 07.05.11
12.	Corporate Plan 2011/15	LNI 08.05.11
13.	Business Plan 2011/12	LNI 09.05.11
14.	Corporate Risk Register	LNI 10.05.11
15.	Service Plans and Risk Registers 2011/12 Business Areas A, B, C + D - Finance - HR - Assets - ICT - Planning and Performance	LNI 11.05.11
16.	Review of Opening Hours	LNI 12.05.11
17.	Summer Opening Hours	LNI 13.05.11
18.	East Belfast Community Development Agency: Former Templemore Avenue School	LNI 14.05.11
19.	Stock Assets Project - Project Initiation Document - Project Plan - Definitions & Accounting Policy	LNI 15.05.11
20.	Lone Working Policy	LNI 16.05.11
21.	Flexible Retirement Policy	LNI 17.05.11

22.	Major Works (Capital) Plan 2011/12	LNI 18.05.11
23.	Minor Works (Capital) Plan 2011/12	LNI 19.05.11
24.	Recurrent Maintenance 2011/12	LNI 20.05.11
25.	Surplus Property – Disposal Progress Report	LNI 21.05.11
26.	Signing of Contracts – Hollywood, Newry & Ballynahinch Libraries	LNI 22.05.11
27.	Schedule of Meetings June 2011 – June 2012	LNI 23.05.11
28.	Any Other Notified Business	
29.	Date of Next Meeting	

2011 US Open Champion, Rory McIlroy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to celebrate and commemorate Rory McIlroy's victory in the 2011 U.S. Open Championship.

(AQW 1043/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials have already been in contact with Rory's agents to take forward the arrangement of a reception in Parliament Buildings at the earliest possible date to celebrate his tremendous victory in the US Open Golf Championship at the Congressional Country Club, Maryland. I have also written to Rory to congratulate him on this outstanding achievement and what I trust will be his first of many major titles.

2011 US Open Champion, Rory McIlroy

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will host a reception in Parliament Buildings for the 2011 US Open Champion, Rory McIlroy.

(AQW 1055/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials have already been in contact with Rory's agents to take forward the arrangement of a reception in Parliament Buildings at the earliest possible date to celebrate his tremendous victory in the US Open Golf Championship at the Congressional Country Club, Maryland. I have also written to Rory to congratulate him on this outstanding achievement and what I trust will be his first of many major titles.

Department of Education

Nursery School Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education whether the preference given to children with birthdays in July and August when allocating nursery school places is consistent with the Executive's local, national and international obligations on the rights of children and equality legislation.

(AQW 62/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The development of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in 1998, in line with wider Government policy, was an important step in making appropriate pre-school education provision available for children before they start compulsory education.

It was established, and has continued to develop, under legislative powers contained in the Education (NI) Order 1998 – Part V - Pre-School Education – Chapter 1 – Provision of Pre-School Education.

The Pre-school year is a non-compulsory phase of education, but research has confirmed that the benefits of a quality pre-school experience to the social, emotional and intellectual development of children cannot be under-estimated.

In determining the admissions criteria the Department specifies two priorities, one of which is 4-year olds with July and August birthdays – because these children do not enter compulsory education until after their 5th birthday. This targeting process, which is part of DE's wider strategy to reduce levels of educational underachievement in the long-term, has been in operation since the 1999/2000 school year.

During the debate on Nursery Provision in the Assembly on 7 June 2011, I indicated my intention to carry out a review of the Department's criteria associated with the operation of the Pre School Education Expansion Programme in the coming months, including that relating to July/August birthdays.

In respect of United Nations Rights of the Child (UNCRC) obligations on education, the approach to pre-school provision is in line with a progressive approach to the UNCRC requirements. Provisions contained within The Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, do not extend to the provision of education in schools.

Craigavon Primary School Principals' Group

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what discussions (i) his Department; and (ii) the Southern Education and Library Board have had with the Craigavon Primary School Principals Group in advance of the publication of a consultation on the future of post-primary education within the controlled sector in Lurgan.^[R]

(AQW 267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the responsibility of the Board, rather than the Department, to bring forward proposals for provision in the controlled sector. As such, the Department has not had discussions with the Craigavon Primary School Principals Group.

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has advised my Department that it initially held meetings with stakeholders from the Post-primary schools in the Craigavon area with a view to developing a strategic plan for the schools in the Two Tier System.

The Board now proposes to issue a consultation document on options for the Lurgan schools to the Boards of Governors of the schools which are part of the system at either Primary or Post-primary level.

This will issue in June 2011 with comments to be submitted to the Board by 9 September 2011. The Board will then consider the next stage of the consultation process in the light of the information received from the initial consultation.

Preschool Places

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places were available for children in the Lagan Valley area in September 2011, compared to the number of children who were eligible for a place.

(AQW 563/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that in the Lagan Valley constituency there were 1234 applications for a funded pre-school place at stage 1 of the admissions process.

Following the processing of these applications 132 children remained unplaced. Eighty of these applicants stated further preferences for consideration at stage 2 of the process, 6 of whom remain unplaced when stage 2 was completed. At the time there were 25 vacant places in the Lagan Valley constituency.

In addition, 5 places in statutory nursery settings were allocated to underage children. In considering applications, all providers are required to give priority to applications from children in their final pre-school year. However when undersubscribed with applications for these places, statutory nursery schools and units are, under the open enrolment arrangements, required to consider applications from younger children and allocate available places.

The SEELB also advise that a number of late applications have been received directly by providers in the constituency and, where places are available these requests have been met. However, as such applications are made directly to providers the total number of additional places will not be known until September /October when the first claims for funded places are processed by the Board.

GL and AQE Transfer Tests

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail how many children in the Belfast Education and Library Board area, who sat the GL and AQE transfer tests, were awarded a place at their (i) first preference school or (ii) second preference school, broken down by grade received.

(AQW 615/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information about the number of children awarded places at schools following the conclusion of the transfer procedure is collected, and can be related to the preferences stated by applicants on the transfer form.

Information about the numbers of pupils sitting unregulated tests that facilitate the use of academic admissions criteria, and the grades they achieve, is not collected as the use of such tests contravenes my Department's policy on post-primary transfer. Furthermore, the transfer form no longer requires information about test results to be systematically recorded on it, and primary school principals no longer have a role in verifying information provided on the form. This question can therefore only be answered without reference to unregulated test results.

At the conclusion of the Transfer 2011 procedure in the Belfast Education and Library Board area 88% of applicants were placed at the post-primary school named on the transfer form as their first preference school, whilst 73% of applicants who named a school as their second preference school were placed at that school.

Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether he has discussed the removing the requirement for a Certificate in Religious Education with the Minister for Employment and Learning or his Department.

(AQW 673/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools has established the certificate in religious education as a mandatory requirement for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a Catholic Maintained nursery or primary school in the north of Ireland.

I have not discussed the certificate in religious education with the Minister for Employment and Learning or his Department. However, my Department is currently engaged in a review to assess the impact of the requirement of a religious certificate on current and future recruitment opportunities in the teaching sector. It is anticipated the review will be finalised in 2011. The outcome of the review will be shared with the Education Committee.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 692/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am still considering the priorities for education legislation. There is an urgent need for reform of education administration and, subject to political agreement, I intend to bring proposals to the Executive as a matter of priority. I will also consider the need for legislation on early years to address specific issues and on special education, should the final proposals from the review of special education and inclusion require it.

Primary School Places

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how many children in (i) Carrickfergus; (ii) Larne; and (iii) Newtownabbey, who are in their immediate pre-school year (a) have been; and (b) have not been awarded a primary school place.

(AQW 695/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that the number of children in (i) Carrickfergus; (ii) Larne; and (iii) Newtownabbey, who are in their immediate pre-school year and have been awarded a primary school place (i.e. in a "reception class") are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| (i) Carrickfergus | 0 |
| (ii) Larne | 5 |
| (iii) Newtownabbey | 6 |

The NEELB do not hold information on the number of children in their immediate pre-school year who have not been awarded a primary school place.

Parkhall Integrated College Building in Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent on maintaining the Parkhall Integrated College building in Antrim, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 715/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for maintaining controlled integrated school buildings lies with the Education and Library Boards. North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) expenditure in relation to maintaining the Parkhall Integrated College building over the five year period commencing 2006/07 is as follows:-

2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
11,107	47,261	38,957	70,443	54,601

Teaching Staff Redundancies

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what assessment his Department has made of any further teaching or non-teaching staff redundancies.

(AQW 754/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has made funding available to assist employing authorities with the compensation costs of teacher redundancies at 31 August 2011; 252 had been confirmed by 31 March 2011. The employing authorities are currently assessing the need for further redundancies.

The number of teacher redundancies has fallen dramatically in recent years; the level is far below that of around five years ago when the figure was regularly over 500. Moreover, the majority of these are voluntary redundancies. The figure has risen in the current year as the Department of Education set aside funding to assist employing authorities to encourage volunteers and minimise the need for compulsory redundancies.

The Education and Library Boards, as the employing authorities for non-teaching school-based staff, are currently assessing the need for further redundancies.

Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, once the size of an individual school budget is determined, it is then the responsibility of the Boards of Governors and Principals of each school to determine spend, planning and the use of the available delegated funding to maximum effect in accordance with their school's own needs and relative priorities. This includes the setting of teacher complements and other staffing levels.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what proportion of newly qualified teachers have obtained a full-time position in each of the last three years.

(AQW 777/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proportion of newly qualified teachers who have obtained a full-time position in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below: -

Financial Year	Total NI Graduates ⁽¹⁾	Graduates registered with GTCNI ⁽¹⁾	First employed Full-time Academic Year 2008/09 ^{(2)&(3)}	Proportion employed Total NI Graduates%	Proportion employed of Graduates registered with GTCNI %
2008/09	735	638	101	13.74	15.83
2009/10	691				
2010/11	678				
2009/10					
2008/09	735	638	75	10.20	11.76
2009/10	691	607	74	10.71	12.19
2010/11	678				
2010/11					
2008/09	735	638	55	7.48	8.62
2009/10	691	607	70	10.13	11.53
2010/11	678	594	38	5.60	6.40

Notes:

- (1) Graduate data provided by General Teaching Council (in financial years)
- (2) Employment data from DE payroll as at 15 June 2011 (in academic years)
- (3) Figures do not include voluntary grammar schools as the Department does not hold their payroll information

Nursery School Places

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education how many fully funded nursery school places will be available in the Carrickfergus area from September 2011.

(AQW 786/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that in Carrickfergus there is a total of 442 funded pre-school places available for September 2011: 312 in statutory nursery settings and 130 in voluntary/private settings. The number of places available in the voluntary/private sector may increase by September if requests for additional places are received in respect of unplaced children.

Nursery School Places

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education how many children were not offered a fully funded nursery school place from September 2011 in the (i) Carrickfergus; and (ii) Larne areas.

(AQW 787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that at the end of stage 1 of the admissions process there were 11 children unplaced in Carrickfergus and 7 unplaced in Larne. Eight of the 11 unplaced children in Carrickfergus submitted further preferences for consideration in stage 2 of the admissions process as did 5 of the 7 unplaced children in Larne. All of these children were placed at the end of stage 2.

The NEELB also advise that they have dealt with a number of late applications which have been received directly by providers in both Carrickfergus and Larne and, where places are available these requests have been met. However, of these late applications 3 children remain unplaced in Carrickfergus and 2 remain unplaced in Larne.

Transfer Tests

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education, in light of the speculation that transfer tests had been leaked to parents in advance of the testing date, what action he intends to take to address this issue.

(AQW 803/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Further to a statement in the press alleging a breach in the security of GL test papers, the Catholic Principals Association provided to me, on 8 June 2011, the papers that the Association claims support this allegation. I initiated an investigation involving the Catholic Principals Association, the Post-primary Transfer Consortium and the company that owns the copyright of the test papers used by these schools.

As it is important that the allegations being made are looked into by the schools who are responsible for operating these tests, the Department has sought explanations and assurances in relation to this matter from the Post-primary Transfer Consortium.

I will inform the Assembly of the outcome of this investigation in due course.

Examination Mistakes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what was the total cost to his Department of the recent examination mistakes made by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

(AQW 809/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I was disappointed to be informed of several errors in examination papers from a range of awarding bodies, including CCEA, sat by students here in recent weeks.

The Qualifications Regulators here and in England and Wales are responsible for following up on these errors and ensuring that the interests of all candidates are protected. I welcomed their recent statement calling on awarding organisations to carry out further checks and I subsequently met with our own Regulator to receive a report from him on the impact of these errors on pupils here.

Although these errors have placed demands on my time and that of my officials, it is simply not possible to attribute a direct or total cost to the Department of dealing with them.

Postgraduate Certificate in Education Places

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education (i) how many Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) places were available for the current academic year; and (ii) whether he has considered allowing people who are self-funded or sponsored by an organisation to access teacher training, and if so, what impact this would have on the current provision.

(AQW 811/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the approved intakes to initial teacher education (ITE) courses, including Post Graduate Certificate of Education places, are routinely published on the Department of Education (DE) website and can be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk/teachers_-_teaching_in_northern_ireland-4_approved_intakes.htm. This information is updated on an annual basis.

As autonomous bodies, the selection of candidates for admission to ITE courses is entirely a matter for the higher education institutions (HEIs), subject to candidates satisfying the minimum entry requirements set by DE in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning. The HEIs have advised that there are currently no students enrolled on their PGCE courses that are self-funded or sponsored by an organisation.

Any admissions to ITE courses on a self-funded or sponsored basis would be considered by DE to count towards an HEI's intakes allocation which DE determines each year.

Teaching Vacancies

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to ensure that the eligibility criteria for teaching vacancies are accessible to the widest possible number of teachers, including newly qualified teachers.

(AQW 814/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Teaching vacancies are widely advertised in the local press and open to all eligible teachers who meet the eligibility criteria. The responsibility for developing relevant and focussed job descriptions, personnel specifications and job advertisements rests with the Boards of Governors of individual schools, in consultation with the relevant employing authority. Eligibility criteria must be made known to prospective applicants, related to the ability to do the job and must be non-discriminatory.

It is imperative that newly qualified teachers are given every opportunity to obtain teaching posts and I have been advised by the employing authorities that the experience criterion used for the recruitment and selection of teachers does not differentiate between those with experience in permanent posts and those with experience in temporary or supply teaching posts. All experience (temporary or permanent) is taken into account when checking applications against criteria. If an employing authority finds evidence of inappropriate practice it does not ratify the appointment(s).

In the context of the forthcoming School Workforce Review my Department will consider whether employing authorities should review the recruitment, selection and eligibility criteria to ensure that they are accessible to the widest possible number of potential applicants, including newly qualified teachers seeking employment.

Asperger's Syndrome

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what assistance is available for children in mainstream primary education who have Asperger's Syndrome.

(AQW 816/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have statutory responsibility for identifying, assessing and meeting the special education needs (SEN) of the children in their area. They take into account the individual needs of each child and there will be variations, therefore, in the provision for children with SEN, including Asperger's Syndrome.

The Chief Executives of the ELBs have advised that a variety of assistance is available in mainstream primary education for children who have Asperger's Syndrome including:-

- access to specialist advice, support and training from the ELB's autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) service;
- a structured transition programme during the third term of year 7 to assist children with an ASD transferring from primary to post primary schools;
- small group placement for pupils with statements of SEN in a learning support centre;

- access to the ELB's Behaviour Support Service;
- access to specialist language teachers and the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety's therapy services;
- classroom assistance and support from either a peripatetic teacher or an outreach teacher attached to a special school.

Since the publication of the Task Group Report on Autism in 2002 the Department of Education (DE) has secured additional resources totalling some £10m to support positive measures in the area of autism.

One of the most notable achievements has been the establishment of the inter-board ASD Group, set up to oversee the establishment of five board structures to enable them to offer a more comprehensive support programme to children with an autistic spectrum disorder, their families and schools.

The ASD inter-board service has achieved much in the training and professional development of school and ELB staff and made notable improvements in other areas, including early intervention, pre-school provision, multi-agency working and in the promotion of consistency and commonality of practice.

DE has also funded the production of classroom resources to support positive interventions for children with ASD. These include complementary parent and teacher videos/ CD-ROMs and guidance material on autism for use on a north/south basis, "ASD a Guide to Classroom Practice" and "Evaluating Provision for Autism" for all schools as an aid to teachers and classroom assistants.

In addition the Middletown Centre for Autism provides a range of training to education professionals and parents on supporting children with autism, including children with Asperger's Syndrome.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail how many newly qualified teachers obtained a permanent full-time teaching position within (i) one year; and (ii) two years of graduating.

(AQW 834/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of newly qualified teachers who obtained a permanent full-time teaching position within (i) one year; and (ii) two years of graduating is detailed in the table below: -

Financial Year	Total NI Graduates(1)	Graduates registered with GTCNI(1)	First employed Full-time (Academic Year) 2006/07 (2&3)	First employed Full-time (Academic Year) 2007/08 (2&3)	First employed Full-time (Academic Year) 2008/09 (2&3)	First employed Full-time (Academic Year) 2009/10 (2&3)	First employed Full-time (Academic Year) 2010/11 (2&3)
2006/07	807	672	91	128			
2007/08	805	676		107	113		
2008/09	735	638			101	75	
2009/10	691	607				74	70
2010/11	678	594					38

Notes:

- (4) Graduate data provided by General Teaching Council (in financial years)
- (5) Employment data from DE payroll as at 15 June 2011 (in academic years)
- (6) Figures do not include voluntary grammar schools as the Department does not hold their payroll information

Children Statemented

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children have been statemented in each of the last five years, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 852/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

STATEMENTED PUPILS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD 2006/07 – 2010/11

Year	Education and Library Board					Total
	Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	
2006/07	1,790	2,064	2,446	3,341	2,850	12,491
2007/08	1,951	2,151	2,504	3,302	3,066	12,974
2008/09	2,094	2,133	2,548	3,235	3,261	13,271
2009/10	2,309	2,144	2,577	3,210	3,334	13,574
2010/11	2,479	2,217	2,634	3,260	3,308	13,898

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to funded pupils in voluntary and private preschool centres and grant-aided nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools.
- 2 Statemented pupils are those children at Stage 5 on the SEN Code of Practice.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 901/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since May 2007, I, or my predecessor, have attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:-

Education Sectoral:

- 14 November 2007
- 28 May 2008
- 10 December 2008
- 20 May 2009
- 25 November 2009
- 23 June 2010
- 21 January 2011

Other sectoral (as accompanying Minister):

- 26 October 2007 (Language)
- 9 July 2009 (Inland Waterways)

- 25 November 2009 (Language)
- 26 May 2010 (Inland Waterways)
- 26 May 2010 (Language)
- 3 November 2010 (Inland Waterways)
- 3 November 2010 (Language)

Plenary:

- 17 July 2007
- 7 February 2008
- 23 January 2009
- 6 July 2009
- 14 December 2009
- 5 July 2010
- 21 January 2011
- 10 June 2011

Institutional:

- 30 October 2007

Following each NSMC meeting, an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued, listing all those who attended and the outcomes agreed, and this is posted on the NSMC website at www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org.

Also, after each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in an NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

SEELB: Review of Procurement Practice and the Management of Contracts

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education what action his Department has taken in relation to the nine recommendations made in the report on the 'Review of Procurement Practice and the Management of Contracts in the South Eastern Education and Library Board'.

(AQW 911/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In response to the 'Review of Procurement Practice and the Management of Contracts in the South Eastern Education and Library Board' (SEELB), my Department commissioned a range of measures to ensure the report's recommendations were addressed comprehensively.

Most particularly, an independent procurement expert was appointed to assist the SEELB in the development of an Action Plan to tackle the recommendations and monthly Procurement Governance and Accountability meetings between my Department and the SEELB have been introduced.

I have now considered and approved the SEELB Action Plan. I am confident that the full and immediate implementation of the plan will ensure that procurement is effectively and efficiently managed in the SEELB. The independent procurement expert will review implementation of the Action Plan in six months and report to the Department.

Indeed, a number of the review recommendations have now been implemented. Reviews of the SEELB's procurement structures, resources and skills and of the new Term Service Contract for building maintenance have been carried out. A Procurement Risk Register has also been established and both a revised anti-fraud policy and new procedures for authorising and approving Single Tender Actions introduced.

Centre of Procurement Expertise

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to outline a timescale for the creation of a Centre of Procurement Expertise; and what preliminary work has been completed to date.

(AQW 913/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In recognition of the need for modernisation of procurement processes and practice in the education sector, the Department has established a unit to develop proposals for a single Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), which will ensure consistent application of best practice and delivery of Best Value for Money for the tax payer. It is envisaged that detailed proposals for the CoPE will be developed by March 2012, with implementation from April 2012.

My officials are currently researching and engaging with key stakeholders to gather best practice examples to inform the development of policy proposals. In addition, the recent Gateway Style Reviews of the procurement and contract management arrangements in each of the Education and Library Boards have provided an important baseline measure of current procurement procedures and practice, which will inform the development of proposals.

Ballyclare Secondary School: Maintenance Expenditure

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what was the total maintenance expenditure for Ballyclare Secondary School in each of the last five years.

(AQW 927/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Maintenance at Ballyclare Secondary School is carried out by the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB). In the last five years the Board has spent £361,888 on maintenance works at the school as detailed in the table below:-

2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
40,015	111,648	75,322	78,572	56,331

Ballyclare Secondary School

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of (i) the number of pupils living in each postcode area who currently attend Ballyclare Secondary School; and (ii) the religious background of pupils in Ballyclare Secondary School in each of the last three years.

(AQW 931/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the tables below.

POSTCODE AREAS RESIDED IN BY PUPILS ENROLLED IN BALLYCLARE SECONDARY SCHOOL – 2008/09 – 2010/11

Postcode area	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Postcode missing/ unknown/ not provided	0	0	*
BT9	0	0	*
BT14	0	*	*
BT29	*	*	*
BT36	195	190	174
BT37	16	21	18
BT38	#	8	14

Postcode area	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
BT39	740	734	746
BT40	20	20	16
BT41	10	10	9
BT42	27	28	25
Total	1,016	1,016	1,009

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF PUPILS ENROLLED IN BALLYCLARE SECONDARY SCHOOL – 2008/09 – 2010/11

Religious Background ¹	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Protestant	838	840	849
Catholic	6	5	6
Other Christian/ Non Christian/ No religion/ religion not known	172	171	154
Total	1,016	1,016	1,009

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Based on information provided by pupils' parents.
- * denotes fewer than 5 pupils
- # denotes figure greater than, or equal to, 5 treated to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Careers Education and Guidance

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to improve careers education and guidance in post-primary schools.

(AQW 951/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Access to the highest quality careers education advice and guidance is essential for our young people at key decision points in their education and beyond given the range of complex choices available to them. I am committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of careers education in schools and will be taking this forward through the full and continuing implementation of the joint DE/DEL Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Strategy that was published in 2009. Together with the Employment and Learning Minister, I recently reviewed progress in implementing this strategy and our report was shared with schools. I have arranged for a copy of that report to be placed in the Assembly Library.

As that strategy makes clear, the drive to provide good careers advice is the responsibility of a number of key stakeholders, including not just the Department of Education but also schools, the careers service and employers. Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of good careers education including quality standards indicators developed by ETI and the Department's own Guide to developing effective careers decision makers which aims to improve the quality of career learning opportunities and to encourage greater cohesion in the provision information advice and guidance within schools. Additionally, the professional advisors who work in the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Service play an extremely important role including in providing young people with high quality information, advice and guidance.

I also want to develop closer working relationships with business and its representative bodies to ensure that employers too continue to play their full part in ensuring that our young people make the career decisions that are right for them and right for our economy.

CCEA Examination Papers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils were affected by the errors in the CCEA examination papers.

(AQW 957/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Pupils here have been affected by errors in papers set by several Awarding Organisations. I have been advised that two of these errors occurred in papers set by CCEA.

In the first, a printing error was identified in CCEA's GCE Further Mathematics examination paper which was taken by 122 candidates, all from here.

The second error appeared in a numerical table contained within a CCEA GCSE Business Studies paper. 2,891 candidates from here and 549 candidates from England completed this examination. Because of the nature of this error, CCEA believes no student should have been disadvantaged. However, each paper will

be carefully scrutinised by its Senior Examining Team as a precaution.

In both cases, CCEA will work to ensure that no candidate has been disadvantaged as a result of these errors. Additionally the Qualifications Regulator, who briefed me last week on the errors and their impact, will be ensuring that the interests of pupils here who were affected by errors in papers set by other awarding bodies are safeguarded.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 971/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The RPA is the key to achieving the objectives of raising standards and putting in place modern, fit-for-purpose administration arrangements. The case for reform is as strong as ever.

The RPA remains a priority for my department. I am meeting stakeholders across the education system. My aim is to secure consensus on the need for reform of education administration and to bring proposals to the Executive in the near future.

Staffing Needs of Schools

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education (i) whether he has made an assessment of the staffing needs of all types of schools over the next five years; (ii) if he is aware of the skills base of the current unemployed teacher workforce; and (iii) whether he has had any consultations with the Minister for Employment and Learning regarding the levels of recruitment to teacher training establishments.

(AQW 974/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) Schools have delegated authority under the Local Management of Schools arrangements to determine spending priorities. It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors of each school to determine the complement of staff required, both teaching and non-teaching, for the school to operate effectively.
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) holds details of those teachers actively seeking work as a teacher here. The information held on NISTR includes details of the subjects, sector, and phase of education registered teachers are trained to teach. This information is shared with my Department on a quarterly basis. NISTR also provides information on previous

work experience and skills/expertise held by those seeking work, including whether or not individuals are trained to teach those with a particular special educational need or through the medium of Irish. This information assists schools in determining a best match for teacher vacancies and aids the Department in terms of forecasting the demand for teachers, including those in specific priority or shortage areas.

In addition, on an annual basis, the Department collects and analyses information from the local Higher Education Institutions on the teaching qualifications gained by new graduates. This information includes the subjects and phase of education that these newly qualified teachers are trained to teach.

- (iii) The 2011/12 intakes to initial teacher education have already been set by the previous Education Minister following consultation with the then Minister for Employment and Learning. I will however be liaising closely with Stephen Farry prior to establishing the 2012/13 intake levels in early 2012.

Capital Investment Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education what capital investment projects his Department has planned for the South Antrim constituency over the next four years.

(AQW 1027/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At this point in time I am not in a position to indicate which major capital investment projects will be taken forward in the next four years. My Department is faced with significant reductions in the capital budget available over the next four years and this will impact on the ability to deliver new school building projects, including those in the South Antrim constituency

Parkhall Integrated College is currently listed on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. In addition, there are five Primary schools and three Post-primary schools in the South Antrim constituency which are part of a large number of projects at the early stages of planning but for which have not been announced for funding.

I will be considering how to make best use of the capital funds available to address the most pressing needs and to maximise educational benefits for children and young people. When I have considered the options it would be my intention to make a statement to the Assembly on the way forward for the school building programme.

Department for Employment and Learning

Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim Area

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 463/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department for Employment and Learning does not fund any services, either fully or partly, under Neighbourhood Renewal. It does, however, deliver a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 489/11-15)

Dr Farry: The annex provided sets out the legislation that my Department proposes to introduce: during 2011/12; on an annual basis; and, insofar as longer-term developments are planned at this point, throughout the remainder of this mandate.

I would stress that the annex is indicative only. Policy work is ongoing in some areas in which important decisions remain to be taken. It is therefore possible that some legislation listed for 2011/12 will instead be introduced at a later date. Proposals are, of course, subject to consultation with the Committee for Employment and Learning and, where appropriate, Executive agreement.

Further legislative proposals may also be brought forward during 2011/12 and the following years of the mandate, as required, to give effect to new, or changes to existing, policies.

Annex A

2011/12

- Regulations to implement the Temporary Agency Workers Directive;
- A Statutory Rule to commence section 3 of the Employment Act 2010;
- Regulations to specify the arrangements in relation to the appointment of members of the Industrial Court and their terms of appointment;
- Regulations to prohibit the blacklisting of trade unionists in Northern Ireland;
- Possible Regulations to amend the Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998 to implement judgements of the Court of Justice of the European Union in respect of the interaction of annual leave with sick leave, maternity leave and parental leave;
- Regulations to correct a minor drafting error in the Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010;
- An Order extending the application of the grievance arrangements under the Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Discipline and Grievance to regulation 51 of the Companies (Cross-Border Mergers) Regulations 2007 (detriment in relation to special negotiating body or employee participation);
- An Order appointing the day for the coming into effect of a revised Labour Relations Agency Code of Practice on Trade Union Duties and Activities;
- Statutory Rules revising the Regulations and Rules of Procedure governing industrial tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal;
- Statutory Rules revising the Labour Relations Agency's arbitration scheme and extending its application to a wider range of employment disputes;
- Order revising the amounts of certain employment rights-related payments in line with the annual change in the retail prices index;
- The Further Education (Student Support) (Eligibility) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011; and
- Amendments to The Further Education Teachers' (Eligibility) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007.

Annual Legislation (recurring each year)

- Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland), to prescribe the basic and higher amounts which higher education institutions in Northern Ireland may charge by way of tuition fees in the following academic year;
- Education (Student Support) Regulations (Northern Ireland) to make provision for support (e.g. grants and loans) for eligible students taking designated higher education courses in the following academic year;
- Education (Student Loans) Repayment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland), which provide the statutory framework for the collection and repayment system for income-contingent repayment (ICR) student loans; and
- Industrial Training (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland), which enables the Board to fulfil its role and raise funding through a levy on employers in the industry.

Remainder of the present Assembly mandate

- Amendments to the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999, to implement any findings of a review of the Order and to make provision for the Pensions Regulator to be added as a prescribed person;
- Further annual Orders revising the amounts of certain employment rights-related payments in line with the annual change in the retail prices index;
- Subject to the outcome of the public consultation and subsequent policy decisions, it is possible that there will be a need for amendments to the primary legislation and subordinate regulations related to higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland; and
- Subject to the outcome of the public consultation and subsequent policy decisions related to the discontinuance of Stranmillis University College and its merger with Queen's University Belfast, it may be necessary to bring forward legislation to discontinue the College and effect the merger.

Northern Ireland: Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have left Northern Ireland to attend universities in the rest of the UK in each of the last three years.

(AQW 531/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of first year Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at universities in the rest of the United Kingdom (excluding the Open University) in each of the last three years is detailed below:

Academic year	Enrolments
2007/08	6,310
2008/09	6,310
2009/10	6,370

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2009/10.

University Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide a breakdown of the number of (i) Protestant; and (ii) Roman Catholic students enrolled in universities in each of the last three years.

(AQW 532/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of Northern Ireland domiciled (i) Protestant and (ii) Catholic students enrolled at Northern Ireland universities in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Protestant	14,200	13,570	14,415
Catholic	19,820	19,380	20,995

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2009/10.

- (3) Information on religion is only collected for Northern Ireland domiciled students.
- (4) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate. In 2009/10, for example, 5,990 students (14%) did not provide a response to this question.
- (5) As well as Protestant and Catholic, the religion breakdown has an "Other" category. In 2009/10, this accounted for 5% of students (2,270).

Proposed Merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he will be in a position to report on the results of the consultation into the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 561/11-15)

Dr Farry: The consultation on the proposed discontinuance of Stranmillis University College and its proposed merger with the Queen's University of Belfast closed on Friday 10 June 2011. A factual summary of the responses received has been prepared for discussion by the Committee for Employment and Learning at its meeting on 22 June. I will then take time to fully consider both the responses, and the Committee's views on them, before reporting on the consultation and taking a decision on whether or not to progress the proposal further.

Financial Assistance for Online Courses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what financial assistance is available for a person with a disability who wishes to enrol in a (i) Further Education course; and (ii) Higher Education course on-line, in their own homes.

(AQW 569/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) **Further Education**

There are currently no courses within the Further Education sector being delivered wholly on-line. However, my Department is currently supporting a pilot in Further Education colleges under which certain nominated courses are being delivered through blended learning, which is learning delivered through a combination of face-to-face and on-line contact. The Department is working closely with the FE sector to mainstream and encourage blended learning approaches, which it is anticipated will widen access and increase flexibility for all learners.

However, the Department provides Colleges with £1.5m annually through the Additional Support Fund to help meet the additional costs associated with Further Education provision for Students with a Learning Difficulty and/or a Disability. This funding can be used to assist with the cost of technical and/or personal support. In addition, Colleges receive a further £2m annually to assist with the additional costs of delivering discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All students enrolling with a disability undergo a needs assessment to establish the most effective method of delivery. Assistance provided will depend on the nature of the course and the degree of impairment. Support available may include assistive technologies such as software and on-line assistance via college communication tools.

(ii) **Higher Education**

All eligible Northern Ireland domiciled students, including students with a disability, undertaking a designated full-time or part-time distance-learning higher education course may be eligible to receive a fee grant to assist with tuition fees, and a course grant to help with the cost of books and other expenditure.

In addition, students with a disability may also be entitled to receive Disabled Students' Allowances to help pay for any extra costs that they may incur when studying their course as a direct result of their disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

Also, students with a disability who are studying an undergraduate course at a university or university college, which is not a distance-learning course, and who are unable to attend full-time

due to their disability, will be eligible to apply for the standard student support package, which includes a tuition loan, a maintenance grant or special support grant, and a maintenance loan if living and studying in Northern Ireland.

Students with a disability may also be eligible to apply for support from the university's or university college's Support Funds if they are in financial hardship and need extra financial help to remain on their course.

First-year Law Students

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) how many first year law students will be admitted to (a) Queens University, Belfast; and (b) the University of Ulster in the 2011/12 academic year; and (ii) how this figure compares to the intake in the last five years and the reasons for any significant variation.

(AQW 588/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) The proposed intake for first year full-time undergraduate law students at Queen's University for the 2011/12 academic year is 240 students. At the University of Ulster the proposed intake for first year full-time undergraduate law students is 76 students.
- (ii) The intakes for each of the last five academic years are set out in the table below. This information has been provided by the respective institutions.

	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
Queen's University	245	253	253	243	232
University of Ulster	123	170	205	190	148

The number of full-time undergraduate places at Northern Ireland universities is regulated as a means of controlling the cost to government of student support. The University of Ulster has in the past exceeded its allocation and I am advised by the University that it is reducing intakes across a range of subject areas in order to address this.

Further and Higher Education

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much has been spent on further and higher education in each of the last three years.

(AQW 606/11-15)

Dr Farry: Spending on further and higher education consumes a significant proportion of my Department's budget. The spend covers funding for the institutions and for the students who attend the institutions. The total spent in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below.

	2008/09 £'000s	2009/10 £'000s	2010/11 £'000s
Further Education	217,589	241,278	228,888
Higher Education	349,289	378,076	407,805
Total	566,878	619,354	636,693

In addition, student loans to cover fees and living expenses amounting to £188m, £214m and £222m were issued in 08-09, 09-10 and 10-11 respectively

Financial Assistance for Students

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what financial assistance is available for students from Northern Ireland studying at third level colleges and universities in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 617/11-15)

Dr Farry: EU undergraduate students, including those from Northern Ireland, attending a Higher Education Institution in the Republic of Ireland are charged an annual registration fee (€1,500 in the current academic year 2010/2011). However, Northern Ireland domiciled students benefit from special student support arrangements in that the cost of their registration fee is currently met in full by my Department.

In the current academic year 2010/11, Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduate students studying in the Republic of Ireland are also eligible to apply for a maintenance loan of up to £4,840 and a means-tested higher education bursary of up to £2,000.

Apprentices

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he is considering how the public sector can further assist the retention of apprentices during the economic downturn. (AQW 619/11-15)

Dr Farry: Public Sector employees, including those employed by local Councils, are not eligible for ApprenticeshipsNI funding. The Public Sector can benefit from the ApprenticeshipsNI training model but the funding of this for employees is a matter for their Department or Public Sector organisation.

However, social clause provisions within Public Sector contracts are designed to encourage successful tenderers to employ apprentices in accordance with the level of public contract awarded. This will have particular significance during the economic downturn. My Departmental officials are engaged proactively with Central Procurement Directorate and other Departments to ensure contractors are fulfilling their social-clause requirements of employing apprentices in accordance with the level of contract spend.

Women in Apprenticeships

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to promote women in apprenticeships. (AQW 620/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department continues to give priority to promoting equality of opportunity for all section 75 categories and ensuring fair and inclusive delivery of its programmes and services. The ApprenticeshipsNI programme offers and promotes a range of apprenticeship opportunities in over 100 occupational areas for both existing and newly recruited employees.

There are currently 11,381 participants on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. 5,375 are female, representing 47% of the overall occupancy figure.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years. (AQW 645/11-15)

Dr Farry: The following table details the amount spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

Year *	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Spend	£4966	Nil	Nil

* Information provided in financial years.

Full-Time Senior Lecturers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of full-time senior lecturers employed by (a) Queen's University, Belfast; and (b) the University of Ulster; and (ii) how many earn an additional income through other employment.

(AQW 656/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) Queen's University currently employs 145 senior lecturers on a full-time basis. The University of Ulster currently employs 150 full-time senior lecturers.
- (ii) Queen's University does not hold such information. The University of Ulster advises that, in the 2009/10 academic year (the most recent year for which complete data is available), 26 full-time senior lecturers carried out consultancy work. The University advises that its staff are permitted to undertake such work with the net income being shared with the University.

Queen's University Belfast

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions or contact he has had with Queen's University Belfast in relation to the proposed cost-cutting measures which could result in redundancies.

(AQW 663/11-15)

Dr Farry: Budgetary decisions made by the Executive resulted in my Department having to request efficiencies of all the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions. I discussed the situation with the Vice Chancellors of both Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster when I meet with them on 25 and 31 May respectively.

Public funding accounts for a significant proportion of each institution's income and the potential consequences of the efficiencies were also discussed with the Vice Chancellors. However, as autonomous institutions, it is for each university to make its own decisions on managing resources, including staff, in the light of the funding available to it.

Adult Apprenticeships

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are his plans for a new funding policy for adult apprenticeships.

(AQW 668/11-15)

Dr Farry: The removal of funding for adult apprenticeships (those aged 25 and over) was put forward as a proposal to reduce expenditure for the Department over the period 2011-2015.

Following the final budget decisions, my Department is reviewing the funding position for adult Apprentices. My officials are currently working through the detail of a revised funding proposition and I hope to be in a position to communicate the future policy arrangements for adult apprenticeships very soon.

North West Regional College's Derry Campus

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown of the religious background of students currently enrolled at the North West Regional College's Derry campus.

(AQW 750/11-15)

Dr Farry: The breakdown of the religious background of student professional and technical enrolments at the North West Regional College's Derry campus for 2009/10 is detailed in the table below:

Religious Background	Number	% of Total Known
Catholic	9,708	81.1

Religious Background	Number	% of Total Known
Protestant	1,994	16.7
Other Christian	60	0.5
Other	212	1.8
Total known	11,974	100.0
Unknown religious background	2,607	-
Total enrolments	14,581	-

Source: Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

Notes:

- (1) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2009/10.

Tuition Fees

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's revenue-generating proposals to off-set any shortfall in the budget as a result of tuition fees not being increased.

(AQW 819/11-15)

Dr Farry: If fees are not increased the Department will face a recurring shortfall of some £40m in its budget by 2014-15. Given the nature of the work of the Departments and our client base, the options to generate revenue are extremely limited other than through an increase in fees. The direct consequence of no increase in fees, or an Executive strategy to address the resultant gap, would be a cut in the range of services provided by my Department, which may include areas such as ApprenticeshipsNI, Essential Skills, the Employment Service and Training for Success. All of which would reduce services and training opportunities for our young people and the unemployed.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many newly qualified teachers graduated in each of the last five years, broken down by the institution from which they graduated.

(AQW 833/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of newly qualified teachers graduating in each of the last five years from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions is detailed in the table below:

Academic year	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Stranmillis University College	St Mary's University College	Total
2005/06	200	175	225	210	810
2006/07	195	175	225	215	810
2007/08	175	150	205	185	715
2008/09	155	135	195	180	660
2009/10	160	130	170	165	625

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (6) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and therefore may not sum to totals.
- (7) The latest available data are for 2009/10.

Driving Lessons for People in Receipt of Benefits

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance is available for people over 25 years of age and in receipt of benefits, who wish to take driving lessons to make them more independent and increase their chances of gaining employment.

(AQW 845/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not provide assistance with the cost of driving lessons. The ability to drive, while making people more independent, is not regarded as necessarily contributing to improved employability.

Proposed Merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the expected breakdown of the religious background of students if the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast proceeds.

(AQW 851/11-15)

Dr Farry: Stranmillis University College's Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed merger shows the potential number of students who would be attending the Stranmillis School of Education by religion, based upon information from the 2008/09 academic year. These are detailed in the following table:

	Stranmillis University College	Queen's School of Education	Stranmillis School of Education (Merged)
Protestant	654	354	1,008
Catholic	195	445	640
Other	27	58	85
Missing data	448	529	977
Total	1,324	1,386	2,710

Notes:

- (8) Data on religious belief is collected as part of the Stranmillis and Queen's enrolment processes in accordance with the internal equality monitoring return. This question is not compulsory and therefore there are some missing data as set out in the table.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Social Networking

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to encourage businesses to avail of the benefits of social networking to aid growth.

(AQW 574/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In June 2009 my Department launched the Logon-NI broadband advice programme specifically for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The programme offers free of charge, impartial guidance on the benefits that broadband can bring to businesses in terms of productivity, efficiency and increased sales through increased take-up and higher value business use of broadband. Within the many ICT solutions offered, Logon-NI encourages companies to consider social media sites within their marketing campaigns. Some 3200 SMEs have benefitted from the programme to date.

Invest Northern Ireland also has a network of ICT advisors based across Northern Ireland helping businesses make best use of ICT to be more productive or access new online markets. This includes

help for businesses wishing to make use of appropriate online marketing channels such as social networking sites to grow their businesses.

These advisors can offer one to one advice to businesses and regularly organise seminars on a range of ICT topics. 165 businesses received specific training on the use of social networking last year. There is also online guidance available on the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website which uses a range of social media to interact with businesses.

Gas Exploration Licence

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in Dublin in relation to (i) the awarding of a gas exploration licence for parts of Counties Leitrim, Cavan and Sligo; (ii) the potential impact this exploration may have on nearby border counties that lie on the same carboniferous basin; and (iii) the potential for operators to use a technique known as 'fracking'.

(AQW 577/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Officials in my Department have been kept informed about the recent invitation for applications and subsequent awards of Onshore Petroleum Licensing Options over the Northwest Carboniferous Basin by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.
- (ii) The exploration, if successful, may help to enhance Northern Ireland's security of energy supply. Production of indigenous natural gas would strengthen the economic case for extending Northern Ireland's gas network into County Fermanagh.
- (iii) If the companies proceed to the drilling phase of exploration they would wish to 'fracture' (or 'frac') the reservoir interval in order to improve the flow rate of gas from the well. This technique was successfully used in the basin when, in 1981, the Dowra No. 1 well in County Cavan was re-entered and the reservoir interval 'fracced'. This resulted in a tenfold increase in the gas flow rates from the well.

Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact the removal of the Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme has had on the retention of jobs within the quarry industry in border constituencies, including Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 578/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The UK Treasury announced the suspension of the 80% Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme with effect 1 December 2010. The suspension was as a result of the EU General Court decision September 2010, following an EU legal action against the scheme taken by The British Aggregates Association and two quarry companies from the Republic of Ireland.

Following an EU Court Hearing 16 May 2011, The European Commission is carrying out a review of the decision September 2010 regarding the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

An outcome from the review is anticipated September 2011.

The negative impact of the removal of the Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme is only beginning to be realised. A combination of bad weather at the start of 2011 and contracts secured pre the suspension of the levy credit scheme, which largely continued up until April 2011, masked the true impact.

The application of this levy in tandem with low demand is likely to lead to some job losses close to the border including Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

I understand that approximately 20 jobs have already been lost in Fermanagh with an additional 21 at risk.

I understand the importance of a swift and positive outcome to the review and will continue to make representations to DOE and HMRC to ensure the matter is dealt with promptly by the Commission.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the Northern Ireland Tourist Board intends to promote this year's (i) 12th July celebrations; and (ii) 13th July Sham Fight in Scarva. **(AQW 584/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote Northern Ireland to the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets.

For the last five years NITB has been working closely with the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland to develop the Tourism Flagship concept which focuses on those parades that want to broaden their appeal to attract a tourism audience. This involved training stewards to be welcome hosts and ensuring that all information produced takes into account the needs of the tourist and not just those familiar with the Orange tradition. This year Randalstown and Comber parades have been awarded flagship status and will feature on www.discovernorthernireland.com as will, the Sham Fight at Scarva. All campaigns direct visitors to this website which gets over 2.5 million hits a year.

Tourism Ireland who have responsibility for promoting the island of Ireland in Great Britain and overseas continues to be engaged in discussions with the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, Orange Fest and other interests in Northern Ireland, with regard to the 12th July celebrations and the portrayal of other aspects of Northern Ireland culture and heritage.

I have been invited by the Royal Black Preceptory to attend the celebrations on 13th July in Scarva and I intend to be present.

Additionally I will launch Orangefest early in July 2011.

Indigenous and Foreign Direct Investors

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number and types of jobs created by (i) indigenous investors; and (ii) foreign direct investors from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, broken down by District Council area.

(AQW 607/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The tables below show the number and types (sector based) of jobs expected to be created, which are described as 'Jobs Promoted', by (i) indigenous investors; and (ii) foreign direct investors that had an offer of assistance approved by Invest NI between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011, broken down by District Council area.

However, it should be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as District Councils. Assistance patterns are demand-led by those businesses which have come forward with projects suitable for Invest NI assistance.

TABLE 1: JOBS PROMOTED IN ANTRIM DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Inward Investor Jobs	Indigenous Investor Jobs	Total
Business Services		6	6
Construction Products		236	236
Creative		5	5
Electrical & Electronics		3	3
Food		12	12

Sector	Inward Investor Jobs	Indigenous Investor Jobs	Total
General Manufacturing		8	8
Life Sciences		254	254
Transport	130	2	132
Total	130	526	656

TABLE 2: JOBS PROMOTED IN ARDS DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		4	4
Clothing	4	1	5
Construction Products		2	2
Electrical & Electronics		1	1
Engineering		6	6
Food		4	4
Total	4	18	22

TABLE 3: JOBS PROMOTED IN ARMAGH DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		6	6
Computer Software & Services		2	2
Electrical & Electronics		6	6
Food		14	14
General Manufacturing		8	8
Life Sciences		2	2
Transport		2	2
Total		40	40

TABLE 4: JOBS PROMOTED IN BALLYMENA DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		6	6
Construction Products		12	12
Electrical & Electronics			
Engineering			
Food			
General Manufacturing		3	3

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Life Sciences		5	5
Printing		4	4
Tourism		20	20
Total		50	50

Table 5: Jobs Promoted in Ballymoney DCA 2010-11 by Ownership

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Construction Products		28	28
Electrical & Electronics		7	7
Engineering		5	5
General Manufacturing		3	3
Total		43	43

TABLE 6: JOBS PROMOTED IN BANBRIDGE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		2	2
Drink		6	6
General Manufacturing		4	4
Total		12	12

TABLE 7: JOBS PROMOTED IN BELFAST DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	532	73	605
Clothing		2	2
Computer Software & Services	323	48	371
Construction Products		23	23
Creative		20	20
Drink		8	8
Electrical & Electronics		10	10
Engineering	30	3	33
Financial Services	545		545
General Manufacturing		1	1
Life Sciences		1	1
Primary Textiles		2	2
Printing		1	1

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Renewable Energy Products		2	2
Total	1,430	194	1,624

TABLE 8: JOBS PROMOTED IN CARRICKFERGUS DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Construction Products		1	1
Creative		3	3
General Manufacturing		3	3
Transport	196		196
Total	196	7	203

TABLE 9: JOBS PROMOTED IN CASTLEREAGH DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		3	3
Clothing		1	1
Computer Software & Services		5	5
Construction Products		2	2
Creative	1	5	6
Electrical & Electronics		3	3
Engineering		54	54
Printing		4	4
Total	1	77	78

TABLE 10: JOBS PROMOTED IN COLERAINE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	1	4	5
Clothing		1	1
Construction Products		7	7
Engineering		1	1
General Manufacturing	1	3	4
Materials Handling/ Quarry Plant		2	2
Telecoms		4	4
Transport		7	7

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Total	2	29	31

TABLE 11: JOBS PROMOTED IN COOKSTOWN DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Computer Software & Services		6	6
Construction Products		4	4
Creative		1	1
Engineering		29	29
Food		11	11
Furniture		6	6
General Manufacturing		7	7
Materials Handling/ Quarry Plant		1	1
Total		65	65

TABLE 12: JOBS PROMOTED IN CRAIGAVON DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	37	1	38
Computer Software & Services		11	11
Engineering		6	6
Furniture		1	1
General Manufacturing		2	2
Life Sciences		46	46
Packaging		8	8
Printing		3	3
Renewable Energy Products			
Transport		1	1
Total	37	79	116

TABLE 13: JOBS PROMOTED IN DERRY DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	297	14	311
Computer Software & Services		12	12

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Construction Products		2	2
Creative		4	4
Engineering		27	27
Food		2	2
Furniture		5	5
General Manufacturing		5	5
Giftware		2	2
Total	297	73	370

TABLE 14: JOBS PROMOTED IN DOWN DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		3	3
Computer Software & Services		6	6
Construction Products		2	2
Electrical & Electronics		10	10
Engineering		6	6
Food		28	28
Renewable Energy Products		1	1
Tourism		3	3
Total		59	59

TABLE 15: JOBS PROMOTED IN DUNGANNON DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		8	8
Construction Products		11	11
Engineering		1	1
Food	1	102	103
Furniture		1	1
General Manufacturing		4	4
Horticulture		28	28
Materials Handling/ Quarry Plant		3	3
Primary Textiles		4	4
Transport		1	1

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Total	1	163	164

TABLE 16: JOBS PROMOTED IN FERMANAGH DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		2	2
Clothing		5	5
Computer Software & Services		6	6
Construction Products		1	1
Electrical & Electronics		4	4
Engineering		1	1
Food		16	16
Furniture		14	14
Primary Textiles		2	2
Tourism	1	4	5
Transport		8	8
Total	1	63	64

TABLE 17: JOBS PROMOTED IN LARNE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		3	3
Construction Products		3	3
Food		8	8
Furniture		4	4
Life Sciences	1		1
Total	1	18	19

TABLE 18: JOBS PROMOTED IN LIMAVADY DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		11	11
Construction Products		6	6
Creative		3	3
Engineering		4	4
General Manufacturing		3	3
Total		27	27

TABLE 19: JOBS PROMOTED IN LISBURN DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	3	23	26
Computer Software & Services		25	25
Construction Products		28	28
Creative		31	31
Engineering		2	2
Furniture		2	2
General Manufacturing		3	3
Life Sciences		1	1
Materials Handling/ Quarry Plant		6	6
Printing		8	8
Renewable Energy Products		7	7
Transport	128		128
Total	131	136	267

TABLE 20: JOBS PROMOTED IN MAGHERAFELT DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Building Materials		6	6
Business Services		3	3
Computer Software & Services		1	1
Construction Products		57	57
Creative		4	4
Electrical & Electronics		1	1
Engineering		6	6
Furniture		1	1
General Manufacturing	1	2	3
Total	1	81	82

TABLE 21: JOBS PROMOTED IN MOYLE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		4	4
General Manufacturing		4	4

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Tourism		6	6
Total		14	14

TABLE 22: JOBS PROMOTED IN NEWRY & MOURNE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		135	135
Computer Software & Services		362	362
Construction Products	1	31	32
Creative		22	22
Drink		1	1
Electrical & Electronics	3	3	6
Engineering		1	1
Food		72	72
General Manufacturing		3	3
Transport		3	3
Total	4	633	637

TABLE 23: JOBS PROMOTED IN NEWTOWNABBEY DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		10	10
Construction Products		8	8
Drink		5	5
Engineering		9	9
Food		2	2
General Manufacturing		1	1
Printing		1	1
Total		36	36

TABLE 24: JOBS PROMOTED IN NORTH DOWN DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services		11	11
Computer Software & Services		2	2
Creative		2	2
General Manufacturing		2	2

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Printing		3	3
Tourism		2	2
Total		22	22

TABLE 25: JOBS PROMOTED IN OMAGH DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Business Services	33	4	37
Computer Software & Services		2	2
Construction Products		5	5
Electrical & Electronics		10	10
Engineering		1	1
Materials Handling/ Quarry Plant	2	1	3
Other Energy Products		1	1
Printing		1	1
Transport		1	1
Total	35	26	61

TABLE 26: JOBS PROMOTED IN STRABANE DCA 2010-11 BY OWNERSHIP

Sector	Externally-Owned	Locally-Owned	Total
Computer Software & Services		1	1
Engineering		2	2
Food		4	4
Printing		1	1
Renewable Energy Products		1	1
Total		9	9

Notes to Tables:

- 1 Jobs Promoted represents the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
- 2 Sectors are based on Invest NI's internal reporting structure.
- 3 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI supported over 1,800 new jobs indirectly through the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start a Business programme), delivered in conjunction with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Table 27 below shows the associated breakdown by District Council Area.

TABLE 27: JOBS PROMOTED THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME BY DCA (2010-11)

DCA	Jobs Promoted
Antrim	42
Ards	56
Armagh	60
Ballymena	35
Ballymoney	25
Banbridge	48
Belfast	281
Carrickfergus	18
Castlereagh	59
Coleraine	72
Cookstown	69
Craigavon	72
Derry	86
Down	64
Dungannon	102
Fermanagh	77
Larne	35
Limavady	57
Lisburn	98
Magherafelt	69
Moyle	18
Newry & Mourne	96
Newtownabbey	79
North Down	64
Omagh	85
Strabane	44
Not Yet Located	7
Total	1,815

Note: At the time of writing 7 jobs supported by the project were still to be located.

Foreign Direct Investors

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many visits foreign direct investors made to each District Council area from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

(AQW 608/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the period from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 Invest NI hosted a total of 124 foreign direct investment (FDI) inward visits to District Council Areas. This is an increase from the total of 105 FDI inward visits across the DCAs in the previous financial year 2009/ 2010

The breakdown of credible¹ visits by District Council Area (DCA) is as follows:

DISTRICT COUNCIL VISITS

	Financial Year 09/10	Financial Year 10/11
Antrim	0	2
Ards	1	0
Armagh	0	0
Ballymena	0	1
Ballymoney	0	0
Banbridge	1	0
Belfast	60	71
Carrickfergus	0	0
Castlereagh	4	1
Coleraine	4	2
Cookstown	0	0
Craigavon	0	0
Londonderry	13	10
Down	0	0
Dungannon	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0
Larne	2	3
Limavady	1	0
Lisburn	3	7
Magherafelt	0	0
Moyle	0	1
Newry & Mourne	1	6
Newtownabbey	11	18
North Down	4	2
Omagh	0	0
Strabane	0	0
Total	105	124

Notes:

- 1) A credible visit is one where Invest NI can claim to have promoted a district council or parliamentary constituency area by bringing a potential investor into that area.

- 2) In addition to the above listed visits, Invest NI has also facilitated a number of visits by other organisations e.g. influencers, overseas governments and trade bodies, which serve to strengthen FDI & Trade links in overseas markets.

Invest NI works closely with potential investors when preparing a draft visit programme to ensure that the locations to be visited meet their requirements and also provide the best opportunity for Invest NI to sell the Northern Ireland proposition.

However, it is important to emphasise that it is the investor's decision to select a business location. This is based on a number of factors, including availability of skills and workforce, transport links, availability of suitable property and the presence of existing sectoral clusters within Northern Ireland. And, in the case of existing investors, most will choose to expand in their current location.

Household Electricity Bill

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that the average household electricity bill in Northern Ireland is higher than the rest of the UK, (i) what plans she has to oversee a reduction in the cost of electricity; and (ii) can she give an assurance that she will prevent further increases.

(AQW 659/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Household electricity bills in Northern Ireland have tended to be higher than the rest of the United Kingdom due to a number of factors, including the fact that the Northern Ireland electricity market is much smaller than the GB market, and that there are fewer electricity supply companies operating in the market. Having said that, in June 2010 Airtricity entered the domestic electricity market in Northern Ireland and has been offering discounts of up to 14% against certain NIE Energy tariffs. The Department and the Utility Regulator will continue to encourage other electricity suppliers to enter the domestic electricity market.

In addition, the ending of a legacy generation contract, and completion of payment for Flue Gas Desulphurisation equipment at the AES Kilroot power plant has assisted in lowering Public Service Obligation charges within overall electricity tariffs, therefore benefitting all electricity consumers.

The Member should be well aware that I cannot give assurances that further price increases will be prevented. Retail electricity tariffs are highly dependent on wholesale energy costs, and there have been increases in natural gas costs in world markets. Such increases will impact on retail electricity prices, given that most of our electricity is generated by gas fired power stations. The Single Electricity Market will continue to put downward pressure on electricity prices, however higher wholesale energy prices will ultimately result in higher retail electricity tariffs.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the marketing budget of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for each of the last three financial years, including details of the places/events being promoted.

(AQW 674/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) expenditure on Marketing in each of the last three years is as follows (please note this includes 50% EU match funding i.e. £2million each year is from core NITB budget):

2008/09	£4,187,000
2009/10	£3,829,000
2010/11	£3,954,000
Total	£11,970,000

NITB's remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend. Each year, NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. The huge variety of products, regions and events featured from throughout Northern Ireland are based on what motivates our key customer segments which have been identified through substantial research.

These award winning campaigns have successfully driven both domestic and Republic of Ireland visitor numbers and spend over recent years with both markets performing extremely well. Last year's campaigns cumulatively delivered a return on investment of £8 for every £1 invested.

Milk Cup Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the reasons why the funding application for this year's Milk Cup was rejected by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; and for her assessment of the application process.

(AQW 711/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) introduced a new tourism events scheme this year to support events in 2011 -12. The main aim of the tourism event fund scheme is to develop existing and new events which demonstrate how they support the draft Tourism Strategy 2020. After a thorough assessment process, NITB funded 59% of all eligible events that were seeking funding.

The Milk Cup passed stage 1 of the application process but unfortunately failed to score highly enough across all of the criteria in stage 2 and therefore did not achieve a score which would warrant funding this year. On 19th May NITB met with representatives from the Milk Cup to explain why their application for funding had not been successful and to provide advice on how future applications for funding support could be developed.

The new events scheme was developed following considerable industry consultation and benchmarking against similar event schemes. All applications were assessed against the same 10 key criteria by two separate assessors using an agreed scoring matrix. All unsuccessful applications were subject to an appeals process. To ensure fairness and objectivity only the information provided with the application form was scored. I am content that the application process was transparent and applied consistently.

In light of the regard in which this youth sports event is held, I have asked my officials to discuss alternative funding arrangements with relevant organisations.

Broadband for Rural Areas

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's strategy in addressing the lack of high speed broadband available for businesses in rural areas, particularly in the Ahoghill area.

(AQW 741/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under Programme for Government 2008-2011 my Department, with support under the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, has invested £17.3million in fibre-to-the-cabinet technology to deliver access to next generation broadband services to at least 85% of businesses across all of Northern Ireland. This includes Ahoghill, where five cabinets have been upgraded to deliver services of up to 40Mbps for business users. A further £2.5million has been contributed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in support of this commitment through a mixture of funding from the EU Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and its core budgets. £13million of the overall Government investment in this project was specifically earmarked for rural areas. My Department has also supported seven projects under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund, which was launched in August 2008 and, with support from the European Regional development Fund, has made available a range of business broadband services across Northern Ireland using fibre and wireless technologies.

Looking forward, my Department recently completed a public consultation exercise seeking stakeholder feedback on telecoms investment priorities for the period 2011-2015. Alongside this work my Department has also engaged with the Department for Culture, Media and Sports and Broadband

Delivery UK to access funding from the £530million made available for investment in next generation networks across the UK. Funds sourced through this initiative and through Budget 2010 will be used to further improve broadband services in rural areas.

Credit Unions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to meet with the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to Credit Unions accessing the Modernisation Fund.

(AQW 829/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no current plans to meet the Department of Work and Pensions about the Modernisation Fund, the scope of which does not extend to Northern Ireland.

My prime focus is on working with the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and Her Majesty's Treasury on making the legislation needed to bring about the transfer of regulatory responsibility from DETI to the FSA. When in place this will allow Northern Ireland credit unions to seek to offer members the same range of services as their counterparts in Great Britain, members' savings will be covered under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, and members will have access to the Financial Ombudsman Scheme. This is expected to be completed in March 2012.

Renewable Heating Incentive

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she has any plans to introduce a renewable heating incentive.

(AQW 879/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In September 2010, I announced that DETI would seek to introduce a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Northern Ireland, providing it was economically viable to so.

DETI has recently concluded an economic appraisal of a RHI for Northern Ireland. I plan to shortly launch a public consultation on the preferred method of incentivisation for the Northern Ireland renewable heat market.

Funding of £25million, over the next four years, has been made available by Her Majesty's Treasury for the introduction of a RHI in Northern Ireland.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions have been taken, or are planned, to address the imbalance in Air Passenger Duty which gives the Republic of Ireland an economic advantage over Northern Ireland.

(AQW 908/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am very aware of the negative impact of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on Northern Ireland and I and Executive colleagues have raised this issue with HM Treasury Ministers. The impact of APD on Northern Ireland is exacerbated because of competitive pressure from the Republic of Ireland, which has become even more acute following the Irish Government's decision to reduce, and possibly remove altogether, their equivalent tax.

HM Treasury has been consulting on the structure of APD. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has been leading on the Northern Ireland response to the consultation. My officials have worked closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure that a strong case has been put to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

Crescent Capital I Fund

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 352/11-15, (i) how much her Department invested in the Crescent Capital I fund as venture capital; (ii) how much on

the fund's closure was (a) distributed to private investors; and (b) returned her Department; and (iii) how much Crescent Capital received in management fees.

(AQW 1001/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Crescent Capital 1 was established in 1995 with £7m provided in the form of a loan, subordinated to private investors.
- (ii) (a) On the closure of the Fund, the limited partners received £13.27m. The private investors received a return of 7.8% pa over the life of the Fund.
(b) The DETI investment was written off. Nothing was returned to DETI.
- (iii) Crescent Capital received fees of £3.6m over the twelve year life of the Fund. This was paid out of the £14m fund.

Broadband and Wi-Fi Access in the North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what action has been taken to improve broadband and WIFI access in the North Down area; and (ii) what grants are available to increase such access.

(AQW 1006/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI currently does not offer grants to individuals to access broadband services, rather, it delivers interventions which are aimed at increasing competition in what is a fully privatised marketplace with a view to driving down prices and offering additional availability.

Significant action has been taken to improve broadband not just across North Down but across all of Northern Ireland. In December 2009, building on the successful implementation of the Local Broadband Access Contract which ensured that a first generation broadband service of at least 512 kilobits per second (Kbps) was available to every premise, DETI embarked on the Next Generation Broadband Project. The aim of this project, which is being delivered by BT, is to bring higher speed broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011. However through the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract, residential consumers can also have access to these higher speed services through the new fibred access points. Pursuant to my response to Assembly Question AQW 704/11, cabinet upgrades have been completed across some 32 areas in the North Down constituency making available broadband services with potential download speeds of up to 40mbps. Details of where these upgrades are located can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com or www.nibroadband.com.

It is recognised that, due to distance from a cabinet or an exchange, not all premises will benefit from the technology deployed under the Next Generation Broadband Project. For that reason, DETI also has a contract in place with Avanti Communications to ensure broadband services of between 512kbps and 3mbps are available to all premises in Northern Ireland.

In addition, the NI Broadband Fund, launched in August 2008, has provided support for businesses and organisations wishing to promote solutions for delivery of commercial, high speed broadband services in rural locations. Five calls for projects have been completed under this competitive fund to date with a sixth call anticipated in the summer of this year. In each instance when calls are launched, as well as advertising in the press, Departmental officials alert the Chief Executives and Economic Development Officers in all District Councils providing them with an opportunity to work with local service providers to develop applications seeking support for localised broadband solutions. However to date there have been no applications for funding to improve services in the North Down area.

Credit Unions

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she intends to contact the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to equality funding for Credit Unions.

(AQW 1022/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans to contact the Department of Work and Pensions about equality funding for Credit Unions in Northern Ireland.

The scope of the Modernisation Fund, which is administered by the Department of Work and Pensions, does not extend to Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment

Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government.

(AQW 328/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department has been advised by NILGA that the sector's consultation on its Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Programme has been completed. I am currently awaiting a copy of the final ICE outturn report which, I hope, will be made available in the coming weeks.

I can also confirm that on receipt and consideration of the report I have agreed to meet with the NILGA President and Chief Executive, as well as SOLACE representatives so they can brief me on developments and discuss the key issues regarding local government reform and the next steps in the ICE process.

I believe that early opportunity for savings and efficiency exist that should be exploited. I will be adopting this approach going forward.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 336/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department must apply the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency and Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review points i.e. points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed. The NICS Review points are 4 occasions or 10 working days within a rolling 12 month period.

In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review.

When a member of staff reaches a Review point an electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR. Inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage. However, this is a matter that I will interrogate further in order to contribute to a further reduction in sickness absence.

Turf at Ballykenver, Armoy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to ensure that local people can continue to cut turf at Ballykenver, Armoy, to retain a local source of fuel in the area.

(AQW 343/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The cutting of turf for purposes other than for sale does not constitute development and as such does not require planning approval. Thus a person may cut turf for domestic purposes without the need to obtain planning approval.

You may wish to note that Turf cut for sale is defined as development under the Planning legislation and as such requires planning approval.

Anyone wishing to extract turf on a commercial basis from the Ballykenver Wood area or indeed any other area would therefore be required to submit a planning application for the development.

Ballykenver Wood is partly affected by the Moyarget Lower Site of Local Nature Conservation Interest in the draft Northern Area Plan 2016. As such this and any other relevant designations, policies or material considerations and the weight to be attached to them will be considered as part of the determination of any planning application submitted to the Department.

I have met with officials to make assessments about turf cutting policy and opportunities, including particularly in relation to fuel poverty.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 409/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides details of my Department's expenditure on external consultancy for the financial years 2007-08 to 2010-11.

	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	2010-11 £
External Consultancy Costs	1,993,716	1,821,675	1,460,069	901,601

I can confirm that, I instructed on becoming Minister, that all consultancy requirements of all values are to be approved by me

Local Council Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 136/11-15, whether he will consider collating data in relation to the number of staff employed by local councils who have a disability, given that an employee with a disability must advise Human Resources of their disability; and can he ensure that the criteria for the appropriate inclusion of people with a disability in the work place are being met.

(AQW 545/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District councils are bodies corporate in their own right and as such, are directly responsible for compliance with their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The legislation places a duty on each council to submit a Disability Action Plan (DAP) to the Equality Commission showing how it proposes to fulfil the two statutory duties in relation to its functions.

All of the 26 district councils published their Disability Action Plans in 2007 and submitted them to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. These DAPs have been updated regularly.

I will write to councils to remind them of the Equality Commission's requirements and urge them to review and upgrade their Action Plans now that the new councils are in place. I will also consider the issue further.

Reform of Public Administration

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the reform of public administration within his Department.

(AQW 630/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The reform of Local Government is a priority. I am actively considering all issues and hope to conclude my consideration quickly and move forward positively.

However it is essential that there is not a replay of summer 2010 when there was a political stand off around the Executive table. A re-run of this would serve to damage public confidence.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to proceed with the final recommendations contained within the June 2009 report on 'Local Government Boundaries'.

(AQW 631/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am considering the recommendations made by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in his report of June 2009. I hope to present a paper on the reduction of council numbers and the boundaries of the new local government districts for the Executive's consideration sooner rather than later.

Reform of Local Government

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any outstanding issues his Department has in relation to the reform of local government.

(AQW 632/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A number of issues are not concluded including council boundaries, timetable, certainty on functions to transfer, councillor conduct, the powers of the Local Government Audit or and a number of other matters. All of these are under active consideration.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 642/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department continues to consider and develop policy with the ultimate aim of promoting a sustainable economy, a healthy society and making the best possible use of our natural resources.

I look forward to working in partnership with colleagues in the Environment Committee and in this Assembly to bring forward a comprehensive range of primary legislation, within the lifetime of this mandate. At this time I can confirm that I will bring forward legislation focused on Local Government Reorganisation and a Marine Bill. I will return to this House with an update on my intentions in due course.

An extensive range of subordinate legislation will also be brought forward within this Mandate, a timetable for which will be supplied to Environment Committee members through the Programme of Work.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 647/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides details of my Department's expenditure on renting storage space for financial years 2008-09 to 2010-11.

	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	2010-11 £
Storage Space Costs	83,483	121,107	94,677

Rose Energy's Proposal for an Incinerator at Glenavy

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether a full economic appraisal has been carried out on Rose Energy's proposal for an incinerator at Glenavy.

(AQW 720/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A full economic appraisal does not form part of the supporting information submitted to the Department by Rose Energy in respect of their planning application for a Biomass Fuelled Power Plant at Glenavy.

During the processing of the planning application the Departments' Economic Branch clarified that they did not require a full economic appraisal at the planning stage but required an Options Appraisal.

Economic Branch were re-consulted with the Options Appraisal on 18 June 2009. They concluded that, having examined the information, they were content that all potential options had been fully investigated and that a reasonable case had been provided to support the decision to progress with the development of a biomass fuelled power plant.

Following the receipt of further third party objections from representatives of Communities against Lough Neagh Incinerator (CALNI) and Radox Laboratories Ltd., further querying the economic aspects of the Rose Energy proposal, a re-consultation issued to Economic Branch on 7 June 2011 and their response currently remains outstanding. Following discussions with Economic Branch is hoped that their response will be forthcoming shortly.

I will of course consider other options if they are forthcoming.

Single Use Carrier Bags

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the practical challenges in relation to the implementation of the proposed levy on single use carrier bags.

(AQO 99/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The introduction and implementation of the single use carrier bag levy is a complex matter which presents a number of significant practical challenges.

These include: the level at which the levy should be set to deliver the key objectives of reducing bag usage and generating revenue; the specific types of bags to which the levy will apply; how the level will be collected and enforced; and ensuring that the staff and operational arrangements are in place to enable the levy to be collected effectively.

A secure, fit-for-purpose and value for money Information Technology (IT) system also will need to be procured, developed, tested and refined to enable the levy to be collected effectively and efficiently. Some advice suggests that the required timescale to complete the IT project is estimated to be up to eighteen months, though I am looking closely at this.

An economic appraisal is being developed for the set-up costs and to choose the preferred option for taking the levy forward. This will require approval from the Department of Finance and Personnel.

I have instructed my officials to accelerate progress on the development of the detailed proposals and wish to assure members that adequate time to consult with stakeholders on the emerging policy proposals will be built into the programme timescale. Ultimately, it should be remembered that this proposal is an environmental one – any financial consequences are secondary, though ones which have an impact on the DOE budget going forward.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Temporary Contracts

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the number of staff in each Department currently on temporary contracts compares with May 2007; and whether there is any correlation between these figures and the use of outside consultants.

(AQW 649/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency do not hold details of staff employed at 1 May 2007, these details are held at 1 April 2007 and therefore that is what has been provided. The data for 1 May 2011 has been sourced directly from the departments.

Departments have advised that there is no correlation between the number of temporary staff employed and the use of outside consultants.

Dept	No of temporary employees	
	1 April 2007	1 May 2011
DARD	59	13
DCAL	8	6
DE	33	5
DETI	7	3
DFP	126	21
DEL	33	8
DHSSPS	31	3
DOE	118	1
DRD	17	5
DSD	264	107
OFMDFM	3	0
DOJ	DOJ did not exist at this date.	3
PPS	PPS did not exist as a separate NICS Department at this date.	19
Total	699	198

Stillbirths

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many still births have been attributed to Group B Streptococcus in each of the last 4 years.

(AQW 704/11-15)

Mr Wilson: During the period 2007 to 2010, there were no stillbirths registered where the cause of death was Group B Streptococcus.

North/South Ministerial Council: Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a breakdown of the community background of staff employed by the North South Ministerial Council.

(AQW 727/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Community background information is held on the 12 members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service working in the North South Ministerial Council. Information on the community background of individual members of staff is protected by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. In order to comply with the Order and to protect the confidentiality of this information it is our policy not to release community background data where the number of staff in any category (ie Protestant, Roman Catholic or Not Determined) is less than 10. It is therefore not possible to provide the information requested.

Ministerial Transport

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 472/11-15, whether (i) funding is allocated to each Department for Ministerial transport, and, if so, how much; (ii) there are any DFP or other guidelines which govern the recruitment of Ministerial drivers; (iii) Ministers are able to fund the cost of a driver of their choice from their departmental budget without recourse to normal Civil Service recruitment procedures; and (iv) all drivers, under the new arrangements, will have Civil Service status.

(AQW 766/11-15)

Mr Wilson:

- (i) Prior to 1 April 2011 DFP was responsible for Ministerial transport. From 1 April 2011, DFP transferred funding to other Government Departments as follows:

Department	Total £K
DSD	34
DEL	62
DHSSPS	34
DoE	34
DCAL	34
DETI	34
DARD	6
DRD	6
DE	6
OFMDFM	74
Total	324

DFP has retained £62K to meet the continuing Ministerial transport needs of the Department.

- (ii) Ministerial drivers employed by the NICS are recruited using standard NICS recruitment practices.
- (iii) At its meeting of 27 January 2011, the Executive agreed to transfer responsibility for ministerial cars and official drivers to relevant Departments. With effect from 28 January 2011, departmental delegations were revised to permit Departments to operate ministerial/official transport services. Accordingly, funding and recruitment are now matters for individual Departments.
- (iv) This is a matter for individual Departments.

Royal Irish Regiment: Welcome Home Parade in Belfast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the decision not to hold a 'welcome home' parade in Belfast for the Royal Irish Regiment, whether he will make representations to the Ministry of Defence about the possibility of hosting such an event in the Stormont estate.

(AQW 848/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am fully supportive of a homecoming parade. However, the First Minister is currently in discussions with the Secretary of State and the Ministry of Defence for alternative venues. It would be inappropriate for me to make any further approaches while there are other options being explored.

Fiscal Policy Levers

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the fiscal policy levers designed to stimulate the economy that he has discussed with HM Treasury.

(AQW 858/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The First Minister, deputy First Minister, DETI Minister and I met with Exchequer Secretary David Gauke and Secretary of State Owen Paterson on 2 February 2011 and 7 March 2011 to discuss the Government consultation document on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy. At these meetings, we discussed the issues raised in the document regarding the devolution of corporation tax, and emphasised the importance of considering other non corporation tax options to rebalance the economy such as R&D tax credits, investment allowances and national insurance holidays.

Furthermore, I also met separately with the Economic Secretary, Justine Greening on 16 March 2011 to discuss the impact Air Passenger Duty is having on the Northern Ireland economy, and the work that is ongoing to obtain EU approval for a replacement for the Aggregate Levy Credit Scheme which was suspended on the 1 December 2010.

I intend following up on these issues when I meet with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander on 29 June 2011.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme will operate; and who will be the beneficiaries.

(AQW 860/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The small business rate relief scheme has been in operation since 1 April 2010. It provides relief to eligible businesses where the net annual value (NAV or assessed rental value) is £5,000 or less. At present 50% relief is awarded where the NAV of the property is £2,000 or less, with 25% relief awarded where the NAV is between £2,001 and £5,000. Further detail on the main scheme, as well as the post office element and exclusions, can be found at http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/lps_fact_sheet_-_small_business.14jan2010.pdf and

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/lps_fact_sheet_-_post_office.pdf

My Department will shortly be bringing forward proposals that would significantly extend the small business rate relief scheme for the spending review period (through to 31 March 2015). This would be conditional on a similar sum being raised through a large retail levy. I would hope to be able to roughly double the total relief provided under the main small business rate relief scheme and increase the number receiving help by around 50%. Additional support of around £6.5m would be provided, at 2011/12 levels.

Virtually all business ratepayers in occupation of premises below the prescribed NAV limits are eligible. There are some exceptions such as car parks, advertising hoardings and telecommunications masts.

As with the current scheme it is intended to provide any additional relief automatically. While this is of great benefit to ratepayers it does mean that relief will be awarded on some non-domestic premises

that are not strictly commercial in nature, for example small clubs. Their inclusion is unavoidable if the automatic nature of the scheme is to be maintained, without requiring a radical overhaul of Land and Property Services' systems.

Consultation will shortly begin on the way forward. I would hope that final decisions can be reached in the autumn, with both measures in place by 1 April 2012 if the Assembly is able to pass the legislation through without difficulty. The changes would apply for three years, through to 31 March 2015.

Investors in People Accreditation

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to seek a review by the awarding body of the Investors in People accreditation for Departments where a serious breach of discipline at a senior level has occurred.

(AQW 893/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I will not be asking for the Investors in People accreditation to be reviewed for Departments where a serious breach of discipline at a senior level has occurred.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 988/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Since May 2007, the Minister of Finance and Personnel has attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:

SEUPB Meetings

7 November 2007, 8 September 2009, 17 February 2010 and 13 January 2011.

NSMC Plenary Meetings

17 July 2007, 7 February 2008, 5 July 2010, 21 January 2011 and 10 June 2011.

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Outpatient Appointments

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the increase in the number of outpatients waiting more than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, and his predecessor's assertion that Health Service staff cannot stretch any further, how he intends to increase productivity of staff in the wake of further reductions in staff.

(AQW 609/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am at present considering a number of matters that impact on staff productivity, including revised targets on staff absence, improved technology and multi-faceted inter-agency approaches to the provision of care. While it is unlikely that the size of the workforce will change significantly, I am confident that there are areas where further productivity gains can be made.

Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional services were provided by the Ambulance Service in the Mid Ulster area as a result of the £875,000 additional funding which was provided following the reduction in services at the Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt. **(AQW 670/11-15)**

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) that it has introduced the following service developments within the Northern area in support of improvements in patient care and also in response to changes in acute service provision.

Following relocation of in-patient surgical services from both Whiteabbey and Mid Ulster to Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals in late 2009, an additional ambulance based in Magherafelt was introduced to provide 24/7 accident and emergency cover at a cost of £500,000 per annum. A&E ambulance cover based in Antrim and Whiteabbey, and intermediate care vehicle cover based in Whiteabbey was also increased at a total cost of £375,000 per annum.

In April 2010, there was further investment of £514,000 to introduce another A&E ambulance based in Magherafelt to provide additional cover following the introduction of a minor injuries unit at Mid-Ulster Hospital.

In addition to the above, and as part of the NIAS programme of reform to increase rapid response cover, a net increase of 1,929 hours has been made available in the Magherafelt area.

Sensory Processing Disorder

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support is available to the parents of children diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder. **(AQW 678/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Due to Sensory Processing Disorder not being included in recognised criteria (International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) version 10, and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) version IV), therapists are currently unable to formally diagnose SPD as a stand alone disorder (however, SPD is due to be considered for inclusion in the revised DSM version V to be published in 2013).

Instead, children are currently referred to as having sensory processing difficulties. Support for children with sensory processing difficulties and their families is provided through the Occupational Therapy service in Health and Social Care Trusts. Occupational Therapists have a range of skills and expertise to help identify these difficulties and to provide a range of interventions, from training and advice to direct therapeutic interventions, depending on the assessed needs of the child and their family.

Sensory Processing Disorder

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many practitioners in each Health and Social Care Trust area have been trained to diagnose and treat Sensory Processing Disorder. **(AQW 680/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Due to Sensory Processing Disorder not being included in recognised criteria (International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) version 10, and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) version iv) (Sensory Processing Disorder is due to be considered for inclusion in the revised DSM version v to be published in 2013), therapists are unable to formally diagnose SPD as a stand alone disorder. Instead children and young people they are referred to as having difficulties with sensory processing. .

Information on the number of practitioners trained to treat patients presenting with sensory processing difficulties is provided in the table below.

Practitioners Trained to Treat Patients Presenting With Sensory Processing Difficulties within the NI HSC by Trust at June 2011

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	13	12.06
Northern	11	9.10
South Eastern	16	12.74
Southern	20	17.12
Western	10	7.40
Total	70	58.42

Source: NI Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
- 2 Treatment for patients presenting with sensory processing difficulties is mainly provided by Occupational Therapists, with some Speech and Language Therapists also providing treatment.

Haematologists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many haematologists are working in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 709/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Medics, Clinical Scientists and Biomedical Scientists specialising in Haematology employed within the NI HSC by Trust at June 2011

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	79	76.25
Northern	42	37.00
South Eastern	21	19.80
Southern	28	26.13
Western	32	29.90
Total	202	189.08

Source: NI Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 3 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
- 4 South Eastern Trust reported that the Down and Lisburn areas are served by Belfast City Hospital laboratories.
- 5 Southern Trust figures include 1 Locum Consultant (1.00 WTE).
- 6 Western Trust figures include 1 Locum Consultant (working 3 Programmed Activities (sessions) per week).

Food Safety Promotion Board

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department has allocated to the Food Safety Promotion Board in each year since 1998.

(AQW 730/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure committed to FSPB in the NI block grant in each financial year since it was established is as follows.

2001/2002	£1,500,000
2002/2003	£1,251,500
2003/2004	£1,598,000
2004/2005	£1,824,000
2005/2006	£1,849,000
2006/2007	£2,083,000
2007/2008	£1,978,000
2008/2009	£2,299,284
2009/2010	£2,542,374
2010/2011	£2,091,000

FSPB operates on a calendar year, not the British financial year.

Gorse Fires

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost to his Department of the recent gorse fires, broken down by the cost in each constituency.

(AQW 734/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service does not record incidents by parliamentary constituency. The figures provided in the table relate to Station Areas, mapped to constituency and are estimates based on the 2010/11 average cost of mobilisation.

**TABLE: NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE: ESTIMATED COSTS OF GORSE FIRES 1
JANUARY – 12 JUNE 2011**

Station Location (Constituency)	Number of Incidents	Cost (£'000)
Belfast East	30	76
Belfast North	63	159
Belfast South	99	250
Belfast West	77	194
East Antrim	137	345
East Londonderry	237	597
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	360	908
Foyle	134	338
Lagan Valley	58	146

Station Location (Constituency)	Number of Incidents	Cost (£'000)
Mid Ulster	183	461
Newry and Armagh	269	678
North Antrim	162	408
North Down	51	129
South Antrim	135	340
South Down	519	1,308
Strangford	102	257
Upper Bann	178	449
West Tyrone	383	966
Total	3,177	8,009

Psychiatric Services

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future configuration and location of (i) acute; and (ii) in-patient psychiatric services in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 776/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Trust is proposing to develop a single 67 bedded Acute Mental Health Inpatient Unit at the Lagan Valley Hospital site. The Trust wishes to co-locate 4 psychiatric intensive care beds alongside the acute inpatient wards. Transferring acute inpatient care to the Lagan Valley Hospital will free up the acute ward in the Downe Hospital which has been purpose built for people with mental health needs. The Trust proposes to use this ward for patients who require longer term care in a low secure environment. Many of these patients are currently resident in the Downshire Hospital, which is no longer fit for purpose.

Services for People with Challenging Behaviour

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has held with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust regarding the current and future provision of services for people with challenging behaviour.

(AQW 780/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not had any discussions with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust about services for people with challenging behaviour. It is for the Health and Social Care Board, which commissions health and social care to services, to assess the current and future needs of local populations and to commission the range of services needed to meet that need from the relevant Health and Social Care Trust.

Community Psychiatric Services

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust regarding the current and future provision of community psychiatric services.

(AQW 781/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not had any discussions with the South Eastern Trust about its mental health services, but I understand the Trust intends to continue to develop community services including Home Treatment and Crises Response services using the investment monies previously provided.

High Suicide Rate

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to tackle the high suicide rate.

(AQW 791/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department allocates £6.7m per annum for the provision of suicide prevention services. This funding supports implementation of the Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy and the operation of the Lifeline 24/7 crisis response service.

Progress on specific actions includes:

- community-led suicide prevention and bereavement support services such as counselling and training;
- provision of Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator posts in each Trust area;
- the Deliberate Self-Harm Registry which provides information to inform the delivery of accident and emergency services, and psychiatric follow up;
- development of suicide cluster early identification and emergency community response plans in each Trust area;
- local research into suicide and self harm;
- regional training on suicide awareness and mental health first aid;
- enhanced mental health crisis intervention services;
- all-island public awareness programmes, evaluation of training, and information sharing;
- media monitoring; and
- education, awareness and support to address alcohol/substance misuse.

I recognise the need to keep our strategic approach under review in order to respond effectively to changing social circumstances and new evidence on effective interventions. The "Protect Life" strategy is currently being "refreshed" to reflect latest international evidence on effective practice and will be fully evaluated in 2011.

Mental Health Services

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the economic recession has added to the pressure on mental health services.

(AQW 818/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been no definitive study here into the effects of the recession on mental health services. However nationally, numerous studies have linked unemployment and other economic circumstances with poor mental health and this is likely to increase demand for mental health services.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of care homes owned by Southern Cross Healthcare in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) the number of residents in each of these care homes; and (iii) the number of these residents who require nursing care.

(AQW 821/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently 7 residential care and nursing homes managed by Southern Cross in the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust area. The number of clients placed in these homes by the HSC is outlined in the table below. All clients in nursing homes require nursing care.

Care Home	Number of HSC Trust clients	Number of HSC Trust clients receiving nursing care
Ashbrooke Care Centre (Nursing Home)	36	36
Three Rivers Care Centre (Nursing Home)	26	26
Longfield Care Centre (Nursing Home)	45	45
Greenhaw Lodge Care Centre (Nursing Home)	43	43
Culmore Manor Care Centre (Nursing Home)	53	53
Melmount Manor Care Centre* (Nursing Home)	56	56
The Sperrins Care Centre* (Residential Home)	11	0

* = Two separately registered homes located on the one site

South Tyrone Hospital Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients living in Mid Ulster who have presented at the South Tyrone Hospital Minor Injuries Unit in each month since May 2010.

(AQW 823/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of patients living in Mid Ulster who have presented at the South Tyrone Minor Injuries Unit is not readily available, as the Department does not routinely collect information on the patient's area of residence. However, information is available on the number of new and unplanned review attendances at the South Tyrone Minor Injuries Unit each month since May 2010, and is detailed in the table below:

Month	New & Unplanned Review Attendances at South Tyrone MIU
May-10	1,675
Jun-10	1,638
Jul-10	1,499
Aug-10	1,558
Sep-10	1,445
Oct-10	1,387
Nov-10	1,311
Dec-10	1,088
Jan-11	1,284
Feb-11	1,196
Mar-11	1,536

Source: EC1 Departmental Return

Gorse Fires

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Fire and Rescue Service of attending deliberately started gorse fires in each of the last three years.

(AQW 850/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below details the estimated cost to Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service of attending deliberately started gorse fires in each of the last three financial years.

Financial Year	Deliberate Gorse Fires	Cost of Incidents (£'000s)
2008/09	3,551	9,126
2009/10	3,100	8,348
2010/11	4,272	10,770
Total	10,923	28,244

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements are in place to secure the future of residents and staff of the 25 care homes owned by Southern Cross Healthcare.

(AQW 857/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Officials are working closely with the HSC Board to ensure that contingency plans are in place to cover a range of potential outcomes from the current negotiations to put Southern Cross on a more secure financial footing.

I appreciate that this will also be a time of some anxiety for those who work in Southern Cross homes providing care to vulnerable residents. While clearly the company needs to take steps to put itself into a more secure and viable financial position, it would be inappropriate of me to comment directly on potential realignment of staffing.

Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether he is committed to implementing fully the recommendations contained in the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability; (ii) how many people with a learning disability living in a long-stay hospital have been there for over a year; (iii) how many people with a learning disability living in a long-stay hospital he expects to resettle during 2011-12; and (iv) whether he has developed a plan to replace the Executive Action Plan 2009-2011 to ensure that no person with a learning disability is living in a long-stay hospital by 2013.

(AQW 884/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The previous Executive accepted the broad thrust of the Bamford recommendations, which spanned the responsibilities of many Departments. My Department is committed to progressing the recommendations through the promotion of good mental health and the reform and modernisation of health and social care services in mental health and learning disability.
- (ii) On 17 February 2011, 248 people with a learning disability had been resident in a learning disability hospital for 1 year or more.
- (iii) My Department is proposing a target of 45 resettlements this year along with a reduction of 15 delayed discharges, a total of 60 resettlements.
- (iv) It remains my aim that all of those currently living in long stay learning disability hospitals are resettled in the community with the appropriate care and support. I am currently considering how best that can be done within available resources.

Accident and Emergency Unit at the Mater Hospital

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will ensure that the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Mater Hospital will remain open and that a full service will continue until he has determined the appropriate level of accident and emergency services for the Greater Belfast area.

(AQW 928/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not made any decisions regarding the re-configuration of health and social care services. I shall be looking at issues which impact on the provision of treatment and care in the Trusts. I want to assure the public that the safety and quality of services will be my first concern. My focus will be on improvement in health outcomes for the population of Northern Ireland.

Mental Health Services

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available for (i) males aged 18-30 who suffer from (a) depression; and (b) anorexia or bulimia; and (ii) their families in the (a) South Belfast; (b) Carryduff; and (c) Ballynahinch areas.

(AQW 935/11-15)

Mr Poots: A full range of Mental Health Services are available to males aged 18-30 who suffer from depression, anorexia or bulimia, and their families, in the South Belfast, Carryduff and Ballynahinch area. The type of services that will be available to this patient group will be dependent upon the level of seriousness of their presentation, but typical services range from Community supports, through to contracted Voluntary service organisations, to Specialist interventions from Community MH Teams, through to Hospital admissions with intensive follow-up from Community Home Treatment Teams.

Each individual is assessed by Mental Health Services, following referral by G.P and services developed as appropriate.

Specialist services for Adults who present with anorexia or bulimia in these areas, are provided by the Specialist Eating Disorder Services at the Belfast Trust who are contracted to deliver these services.

Downe Hospital

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the recruitment process used since 5 April 2011 for middle grade doctors for the Downe Hospital, particularly for the Accident and Emergency Unit.

(AQW 947/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been no formal recruitment of middle grade doctors within the South Eastern Trust for the Downe Hospital since 5 April 2011.

The Trust will formally advertise for Accident & Emergency medical staff, including Specialty Doctors, across all hospital sites on 28th June 2011.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how he will ensure adequate quality of care for residents of homes owned by Southern Cross Healthcare.

(AQO 134/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can reassure the house that there are clear protections in place to cover the interests of the residents of all nursing and residential homes.

Members may be aware that last week Southern Cross and its landlords agreed to work towards a consensual solution to the Company's current financial problems, to be delivered over the next four months, and issued a statement that gave a clear assurance that there will be no closures in that period.

My Officials are working closely with the HSC Board to ensure that contingency plans are in place to cover the full range of potential outcomes from the current negotiations to put Southern Cross on a more secure financial footing.

My conversation last Wednesday with a Department of Health Minister underlined the importance of all four administrations staying in close touch, while ensuring that the resolution of this matter takes account of residents and families in NI, as well as Scotland, Wales and England.

North/South Feasibility Study

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to the cost-saving recommendations contained in the North-South Feasibility Study on health. **(AQO 143/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The North South Feasibility Study was completed in 2009 and was not published. I understand that a number of the recommendations within the report are already being taken forward on a case by case basis.

Driving up the quality of service provision and improving health outcomes for the population of Northern Ireland will be my first priority, and will guide all that I do.

I have already made contact with Minister Reilly in the Department of Health and Children on radiotherapy provision in Altnagelvin Hospital. Where a development, such as this one, delivers better outcomes for people and is cost effective, then I am content to work with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in the interests of the population in both jurisdictions.

Hospitals: Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed new Local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh. **(AQO 144/11-15)**

Mr Poots: I am currently considering my capital priorities, including the Omagh hospital project, for the Budget period. I am somewhat limited by the Budget 2010 capital allocation, which only allows me to address the highest priority projects. I have, therefore, met with the Strategic Investment Board to ask them to consider methods by which the existing budget can be supplemented.

Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

Mr Murphy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans for the development of services at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry. **(AQO 145/11-15)**

Mr Poots: I recently had the opportunity to visit the Daisy Hill Hospital and was most impressed by the commitment of staff and the Trust to provide the people in the Newry and Mourne area with high quality care.

I have not made any decisions on the re-configuration of health and social care services. But I have taken the opportunity to listen to patients, staff and managers and will give serious consideration to their views.

Reform and modernisation is a continuous process which requires that we look for better ways of working; this may require doing things differently and that services may not remain the same. However, I remain committed to Daisy Hill Hospital as part of the wider plan for high quality service provision in Northern Ireland.

DHSSPS: Whistle-blowers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current safeguards for whistle-blowers.

(AQO 146/11-15)

Mr Poots: I want to ensure that an environment exists within all health and social care providers, where workers feel that they can report any wrongdoing or where standards fall below an acceptable level. The provision of a safe and effective service is fundamental. Most staff that want to report concerns already do so, but the most recent HSC staff survey indicated that 13% lack the confidence to whistle blow.

I can provide assurance that where employees in the HSC want to come forward to raise concerns in good faith and reasonably believe them to be true, they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation.

I have a specific policy in place that takes account of the fact that whistleblowers are protected by legislation. The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (revised 2004) protects employees against detrimental treatment or dismissal as a result of any disclosure by them of normally confidential information in the interests of the public.

Developing Better Services

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to reviewing Developing Better Services which was published in 2002.

(AQO 147/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not made any decisions regarding the re-configuration of health and social care services. Developing Better Services was about modernising hospitals and reforming structures. There are different ways of working now and I shall be looking at all issues which impact on the provision of treatment and care for the population of Northern Ireland. My focus will be on improvement in health outcomes, and the safety, quality and effectiveness of services.

Adoption

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed adoption legislation.

(AQO 148/11-15)

Mr Poots: In light of the time, which has elapsed since my department consulted on a range of options for adoption reform in Northern Ireland, I have asked my officials to revisit the original proposals and the public response to those proposals to ensure that they remain valid and fit for purpose.

Department of Justice

Criminal Damage Caused by Prisoners

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the cost and number of separate incidents of criminal damage caused by prisoners in each prison, in each of the last five years; and (ii) the number of prosecutions for these incidents.

(AQW 422/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):

- (i) Table A, below, lists the total number of adjudications for charges of criminal damage, in each prison in each of the last five years, as well as how many of these were found to be guilty.

Adjudications are an essential element of the Prison Service's internal disciplinary system and are used to help maintain order, control, discipline and a safe environment, as well as to ensure that the use of authority in prisons is lawful, reasonable and fair.

Where a charge is upheld at adjudication it is open to the adjudicating Governor to award a range of penalties (including, for example, loss of earnings, loss of privileges or, in certain cases cellular confinement), in line with the guidance set out in the Adjudication Manual, taking into account any aggravating or mitigating factors.

Where the alleged offence against prison discipline may constitute an offence in criminal law, the Governor must decide whether to invite the police to investigate the charges or continue to deal with the matter under NIPS disciplinary proceedings (subject to the provisions of Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 and to the guidance set out in the Adjudication Manual).

In respect of the information at Table A, where charges have not been upheld at adjudication this may be as a result of a range of reasons, for example, the charge may have been withdrawn, the adjudication may not have been completed in time, or the prisoner may have been found to be not guilty of the offence. It is not possible to provide a complete breakdown of the gravity of the individual incidents or of why charges have not been upheld, except at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

TABLE A: ADJUDICATIONS FOR INCIDENTS OF CRIMINAL DAMAGE

Year	Maghaberry		Magilligan		Hydebank Wood	
	Adjudication	Charge upheld	Adjudication	Charge upheld	Adjudication	Charge upheld
2007	87	47	6	5	47	40
2008	51	35	16	14	93	81
2009	71	53	23	18	105	84
2010	210	67	12	11	147	119
2011 (year to date)	69	24	17	13	92	71

It is not possible to detail the cost incurred by each incident of criminal damage except again at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

- (ii) Table B, below, lists the number of incidents of criminal damage which were notified to PSNI for referral for consideration for prosecution. Details regarding which of these cases resulted in prosecution are not readily available from PPS and could only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

TABLE B: NUMBER OF CASES REFERRED FOR PROSECUTION

	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Young Offenders Centre & Females
2007	3	1	3
2008	3	0	2
2009	3	0	3
2010	16	0	2
2011 (year to date)	3	0	1

Separated Prison Unit at Maghaberry Prison

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how much the separated prison unit at Maghaberry Prison has cost since its establishment, including a breakdown of capital and recurrent expenditure in each financial year.

(AQW 540/11-15)

Mr Ford: Maghaberry maintains a system of separation on landings within two different residential accommodations, Bush and Roe, which are treated as one operational group

The cost of maintaining a separated regime in these residential houses is not recorded independently of other costs within the accommodation. In addition to the residential costs incurred there are also costs associated with other activities such as gym, visits, education, and security which cannot be disaggregated.

The table below details the staffing costs associated with the separated regime, since its establishment on 1 March 2002.

Financial Year	Cost
Period from 1 March – 31 March 2004	£256,984
2004-2005	£3,118,842
2005-2006	£3,213,122
2006-2007	£3,280,111
2007-2008	£3,408,417
2008-2009	£3,548,594
2009-2010	£3,890,037
2010-2011	£4,342,896
2011-2012 (Budget)	£4,112,903 *

* As a result of prisoner protests in Roe House overtime was required for officers to manage the situation and prisoners to ensure peaceful lock-up within Roe House. The current estimated cost of this overtime is £39,029. NIPS continues to make every effort to bring the remaining protest action to a resolution.

Similarly, the total capital costs incurred in relation to the separated landings cannot be independently determined, as any capital works will have been in relation to improving residential areas as a whole. However, following the agreement with separated prisoners of 12 August 2010, £844,000 was spent on capital works specifically related to separated requirements.

Prisoners Formerly Released on Licence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners who had been formerly released on licence were returned to custody in each of the last five years.

(AQW 650/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1996, the Life Sentences (NI) Order 2001 and the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 provide for a range of offenders to be released into the community on licence. These licences carry conditions which are designed to control behaviour and risk and thus protect the public from harm, preventing re-offending and promote the rehabilitation of the individual.

The Department of Justice is responsible for setting licence conditions and where appropriate recalling to prison individuals living in the community for breaching the terms of their licences.

Over the last five years, the number of prisoners who had been formerly released on licence who were returned to custody is as follows:

Year	Number
2006	9
2007	7
2008	12
2009	13
2010	33
2011*	37
Total	111

* as at 16/06/11

The number of licences revoked has increased dramatically since 2010 due to offenders receiving Court Sentences under the new provisions of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008. Since the commencement of this Order, there have been 175 licences issued and 55 recalls.

Belfast Family Court

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether it is practice in the Belfast Family Court to have a full panel made up of a District Judge and two lay members or a District Judge sitting alone; and (ii) for his assessment of this practice.

(AQW 660/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) In accordance with the relevant legislation it is normal practice in the Belfast Family Proceedings Court to have a full panel made up of a District Judge and two Lay Magistrates.
- (ii) No formal assessment has been carried out. However I welcome the involvement of members of the community in this very important work.

Domestic Violence Prevention Orders

Mrs Lewis asked the Minister of Justice if he has any plans to introduce Domestic Violence Prevention Orders, similar those being piloted in England.

(AQW 672/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department's Community Safety Unit has been liaising closely with colleagues in the Home Office regarding plans to introduce Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) in England and Wales on a pilot basis. I understand that a year-long pilot scheme will commence in summer 2011 in the Greater Manchester, Wiltshire, and West Mercia police areas. Home Office has indicated that if deemed successful, it would be their intention to roll out the scheme across England and Wales.

The scheme will be subject to an evaluation, and it would be my intention to draw on it to determine the appropriateness of introducing DVPOs for Northern Ireland, taking account of any necessary legislative changes required.

Speeding Tickets

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of speeding tickets issued to motorists in each constituency in the 2010/11 financial year; and (ii) the total amount raised.

(AQW 677/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information is not available in the format requested.

The table below sets out the number of speeding detections for the financial year 2010/11(1). This information is only available by Area Command.

Information is available on the total revenue received in respect of each category of Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN), but this cannot be given for specific offence or police division.

SAFETY CAMERA SCHEME SPEEDING DETECTIONS BY AREA COMMAND: 2010/2011

Antrim	206
Armagh	431
Ballymena	924
Ballymoney	1526
Banbridge	1584
Castlereagh	4803
Carrickfergus	1872
Coleraine	2053
Cookstown	1185
Craigavon	603
Down	158
Dungannon	158
East Belfast	2749
Fermanagh	1485
Foyle	8465
Larne	1608
Limavady	1402
Lisburn	701
Magherafelt	2985
Moyle	1014
Newtownabbey	484
Newtownards	901
Newry & Mourne	960
North Belfast	6101
North Down	1351
Omagh	131
South Belfast	628
Strabane	431
West Belfast	160
Total	47059

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many of the 26 men prosecuted for rioting and other associated charges over the 12 July period in 2010 were granted Legal Aid; and what is the total cost of this Legal Aid to date.

(AQW 681/11-15)

Mr Ford: All 26 of the defendants were granted legal aid.

The costs to date are £34,126.96 however there are some reports still outstanding so the total cost will increase when these claims are received.

Domestic Violence Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to introduce guidelines or legislation on domestic violence cases that would make it compulsory for all such incidents to be treated as charge sheet instead of postal summons, with defendants held in custody after arrest and then produced at the first available magistrates court.

(AQW 682/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no plans at present to introduce guidelines or legislation that would make it compulsory for incidents of domestic violence to be treated as charge sheet instead of postal summons.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 683/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since its inception on 12th April 2010, the Department of Justice, its agencies and arms length bodies spent a total of £54,424.92 excluding VAT on storage space for archived departmental documentation.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what levels of staff were employed at the Prisoner Assessment Unit; (ii) what were the job descriptions of these staff; and (iii) was this level of staffing consistent on a full-time basis.

(AQW 685/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Prisoner Assessment Unit consisted of a group of ten Main Grade Officers plus a Senior Officer. There were five staff detailed each day, Monday to Friday and three staff at weekends.
- (ii) The duty of staff working in the Prisoner Assessment Unit was to protect the public by working with prisoners who were in the last stages of a life sentence and to assist them to prepare for release into the community through a normalisation process, while also testing their suitability for release on life licence.

The job description for the Main Grade Officer working in the PAU is as follows:

Accountability

You are accountable to the Governor with responsibility for the Prisoner Assessment Unit through the Senior Officer for the security, safety entitlements and privileges of all prisoners in your charge.

Purpose

To assist in the day to day management, monitoring and improvement of the pre-release Scheme, consistent with the requirements of the establishment and business need. To work with

prisoners who are in the last stages of a life sentence and help prepare them for release into the community through a normalisation process. An important aspect of the role is to help the prisoner reduce the risk of re-offending.

Responsibilities

- 1 That you are conversant with all Governors Orders / Instructions which are relevant to your post and ensure that these orders are complied with.
 - 2 That any damage to keys or locks are reported to the Senior Officer immediately.
 - 3 Check and return numbers to the ECR at HM Prison Maghaberry when required.
 - 4 Staff working in this location will be expected to visit/carry out checks on prisoner at their work locations, hostels or home addresses.
 - 5 That you will become a personal officer and be a positive role model to designated prisoners.
 - 6 To work closely with Life Sentence Prisoners and be prepared to discuss, confidentially, elements of the offence.
 - 7 To write objective reports regarding the prisoner(s) if and when required.
 - 8 Contribute to the multi-disciplinary team meetings and provide information that will form the basis of managing risk in the community and also contribute to the Parole Commissioners process.
 - 9 When handing over to another officer at the PAU you will pass on relevant information concerning prisoners or conditions in the Unit and will report any suspicious occurrences or changes in prisoners behaviour.
 10. You will assist in searching prisoners' rooms, stores, ablutions and other areas in the Unit.
 11. You will carry out drug/alcohol testing, within the Unit when instructed.
 12. Ensure that all relevant information is recorded on prisoner's file.
 13. To ensure that any requests / complaints are acted on and are passed to the appropriate person within the appropriate time scales.
- (iii) The staffing levels, as stated above, were consistent on a full time basis. However the group was reduced from 12 to 10 from the beginning of April 2011 following an efficiency review.

Equal Pay Claim

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made in resolving the equal pay claim for departmental staff who were seconded to the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Office.

(AQW 686/11-15)

Mr Ford: In respect of staff in the Department of Justice with previous service in PSNI and the Northern Ireland Office, it remains my position that no legal liability has been established which would justify making an equal pay settlement. However, it is also my position that my officials should meet with the trade union NIPSA if they have further or new issues to discuss.

In respect of police staff, the Department of Finance and Personnel have advised that as pay and grading delegation was granted to the Northern Ireland Office (including Police Staff) in 1996, no liability exists in respect of equal pay when comparing PSNI support staff and civil servants.

In respect of both civil servants and police staff, cases have been lodged in the County Court.

Domestic Violence Magistrates' Court Sittings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce special domestic violence magistrates court sittings that cover all aspects of the incident rather than just the hearing of contests, similar to those already in existence in England and Wales.

(AQW 687/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is a commitment in the 2010/12 Domestic Violence Action Plan to consider the feasibility of introducing Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) to Northern Ireland. Following a feasibility study which will include consultation with relevant bodies, a recommendation will be put to Ministers on whether SDVCs should operate in Northern Ireland.

In the interim, the Department of Justice, Community Safety Unit, in liaison with the NI Courts and Tribunals Service and the Public Prosecution Service, is currently working towards piloting a new court listing arrangement which would see criminal adult cases, involving domestic violence, being listed on a set day each month at one of the Courts in Northern Ireland. It is envisaged this pilot will commence September 2011. Any findings from the pilot will be fed into the overall feasibility study on SDVCs.

Victim Impact Statements

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to issue guidance or introduce legislation in relation to encouraging the use of victim impact statements for sentencing in Magistrates Courts. **(AQW 742/11-15)**

Mr Ford: On 15 June, I published an Annual Action Plan for victims and witnesses. The Plan sets out the programme of work we intend to take forward during 2011/12, in partnership with the justice agencies and our voluntary sector delivery partners, to improve services for victims and witnesses.

One of the actions contained in the Plan relates to formalising practice regarding the use of victim impact statements and victim impact reports. I intend to publish a consultation document later this year.

Desertcreat College Development

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Desertcreat College development, including the current stage of the tendering and procurement process. **(AQW 753/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The Health Minister has recently confirmed that the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) revenue element is affordable from within the DHSSPS/NIFRS current revenue budget. The Department of Justice and Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety will now review the final version of the business case before passing it to DFP for approval. This is expected to be completed very shortly.

The procurement process, including tendering can begin once DFP approval has been obtained and is expected to begin early in 2012 and construction to be finished by February 2015.

Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting of Injunctive Relief

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 257/11, the date on which each of the four orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief was made; and whether each order is still extant. **(AQW 763/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Two of the four orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief, which have been made since 2007, remain extant. The two orders now discharged were made on the 21 January 2009 and 16 April 2010. Further information in respect of the extant orders cannot be provided without risking contravening the terms of the order.

Criminal Justice Inspection's Recommendation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the Criminal Justice Inspection's recommendation that the Prison Service should improve its contribution to the public protection arrangements process through greater engagement with training and by strengthening its offender

behaviour programme delivery; and (ii) what action his Department will take to assist in the implementation of the recommendation.

(AQW 793/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service is committed to, and supports, the multi-agency approach to public protection. NIPS welcomes the recent Criminal Justice Inspectorate's positive and challenging report into this critically important area of work.

The Service has accepted the recommendation that it should have greater engagement with training and strengthen its offender behaviour programme delivery. NIPS will review its participation in PPANI training and the PPANI Co-ordinator has undertaken to ensure that NIPS staff are invited to all future training events.

NIPS is also in the process of recruiting additional psychologists to help deliver a greater number and range of offender behaviour programmes. In the meantime it is in the process of issuing a tender document to bring in experienced staff to deliver one-to-one sessions to high risk offenders.

Sex Offenders Management Model

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the current sex offenders management model; and (ii) how it differs from what was previously in place.

(AQW 794/11-15)

Mr Ford: Guidance under the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 established public protection arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI). The guidance states that the relevant agencies must ensure that the core functions of PPANI are established and procedures are in place to:

- identify relevant offenders;
- share information safely and securely;
- risk assess offenders; and
- manage offender risks with the most suitable risk management plans.

The legislation also permits the Department of Justice to appoint two lay advisors to assist in reviewing the effectiveness of the arrangements.

Although the arrangements draw on previous multi-agency working, the statutory requirement to cooperate has resulted in more effective operational working with resources targeted where they are most needed.

Environmental Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many departmental staff currently receive an environmental allowance.

(AQW 853/11-15)

Mr Ford: 2,668 departmental staff currently receive an environmental allowance.

District Policing Partnerships: Independent Members

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current level of threat to Independent members of District Policing Partnerships.

(AQW 869/11-15)

Mr Ford: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on a specific security matter such as this but where there are concerns, either generically or to individuals, threat assessments may be sought.

Firearm Certificate Applications

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of firearm certificate applications submitted by people in the Newry and Armagh areas between January 2009 and January 2011; and how many of these were refused.

(AQW 872/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Case Number 11/000893

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 376/11-15, given the costs submitted to date for case number 11/000893, whether he will revise his estimated costs for the remainder of the bill based on the Legal Services Commission's composite fee system.

(AQW 873/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimate provided in response to AQW 376/11-15 was based on the payments for the Magistrates' Court of £1,205 and estimated costs for the Crown Court of around £9,000. The claim for Junior Counsel has now been received. Based on the receipt of this claim I have revised the estimate downwards to £9,356.

The claim from the solicitor in respect of the Crown Court trial is still awaited.

Release of Marian Price

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Justice whether he has had any meetings with the British Secretary of State to discuss the release of Marian Price.

(AQW 955/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not met with the Secretary of State to discuss the release of Marian Price.

Domestic Violence: Victims' Fund

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice what plans there are to introduce a fund for victims of domestic violence who need protection but who do not have access to public funds.

(AQO 159/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the Assembly Debate on 6 June I welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate my continued commitment to addressing domestic violence. I appraised the Chamber of the work that is being done by the Department of Justice, along with other Departments, other elements of the justice system and a range of NGOs, to address this heinous crime.

Tangible evidence of that commitment was the delivery during my first year as Minister of two initiatives, which I believe will benefit victims of domestic violence.

Firstly I implemented changes to Legal Aid provision which gives victims greater access to the courts by removing the upper earnings and capital limits for those who are seeking the protection of a non-molestation order.

Secondly in the Justice Act (NI) 2011 I included the Victims of Crime Fund which will be resourced by the offender levy. Funding will be allocated to those priority areas where need has been identified - which could potentially include services to victims of domestic violence.

Turning to the provision of services for those victims of domestic violence who have no recourse to public funds, I am pleased to report that since 30 November 2009 Northern Ireland has been part of the UK wide Sojourner Pilot Project. This Pilot Project is for those with no recourse to public funds,

who have entered the UK on a spousal or partner visa and are eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) under the Domestic Violence Rule. The Pilot Project will continue until April 2012 during which time work will be on-going to find a long-term solution to ensure victims are protected.

The Sojourner Pilot Project is a positive step, but we must not be complacent. Having no recourse to public funds has, much broader implications in terms of accommodation provision, access to benefits, and immigration status – matters which cut across a number of Departments and Agencies. It can affect a range of individuals under immigration status and cuts across a number of different communities where individuals working here legally may, through no fault of their own, find themselves destitute and in need of short-term or bridging support.

So while I, once again, give my wholehearted commitment to do all I can to tackle the issue of domestic violence, and to put measures in place to protect all victims of domestic violence, including those within the immigrant community, it remains incumbent on all to continue to work together to address the many cross-cutting issues which impact on victims of domestic violence including the issue of no recourse to public funds.

Public Prosecution Service

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to ensure that there is transparency in the governance and accountability of the Public Prosecution Service.

(AQO 155/11-15)

Mr Ford: Arrangements for governance of the Public Prosecution Service are founded on the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and came into effect on the devolution of justice matters.

Although I have no responsibility for the Public Prosecution Service I continue to be mindful of wider issues impacting on the criminal justice system. The First Minister, deputy First Minister, Attorney General and I have therefore agreed that the Department of Justice will lead a consultation on governance/accountability arrangements for the Public Prosecution Service.

We met last week to discuss the scope of the consultation which will consider options for the future and invite views. The consultation will launch following the usual Committee and Executive consideration.

Attacks on Orange Halls

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the PSNI about reducing the number of attacks on Orange Halls.

(AQO 157/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware of the Member's interest in this issue, indeed it was a letter from him which led me to ask officials to explore whether further action could be taken in respect of attacks on symbolic buildings. My officials, working with the police, are currently in the process of compiling a report on this matter for me. I expect it in a matter of weeks. I then plan to meet the police once I have had an opportunity to consider this.

I will update the Member as soon as this work has been concluded.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice to outline the timescale for the implementation of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

(AQO 160/11-15)

Mr Ford: Work is currently underway to ensure that the new partnerships are fully established by April 2012 with many key aspects of the partnerships being in place before then.

Such milestones include the establishment of the Joint Committee (that is my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board working together to oversee the partnerships) in September this year; the nomination of elected members by September, and the appointment of independent members in the early months of 2012; the operation of PCSPs in shadow mode from January 2012 onwards, once their policing committees have been established; and the appointment of designated organisations, who will make a wider contribution to the work of each PCSP by March 2012.

In the meantime, Councils are encouraged to commence, or continue with, joint working arrangements between their District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships. This will help to ensure that the new partnerships are fully functional come April 2012.

Prisoners: Suicide

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the recent deaths in custody, what additional steps he will be taking to prevent prisoners from committing suicide.

(AQO 161/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Minister responsible for prisons I take extremely seriously my duty of care to all prisoners and I chair the Ministerial Forum on Safer Custody - a cross-departmental, multi agency Forum which was established to drive service improvements and bring about an increase in the quality of safer custody and the well-being of prisoners that will contribute to a sustained reduction level of self-harming of all people held in custody.

Every death in custody represents a personal tragedy for someone and lessons can be learned from every case. I am aware of the criticisms that have been levied at NIPS and take those criticisms very seriously.

Following recent deaths in custody the Director General of Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) has launched a corporate audit of compliance against safer custody processes, to ensure that appropriate processes and interventions are in place, and that they are being consistently complied with across the Service.

However NIPS faces significant challenges in seeking to respond to the level of need and the high prevalence of mental health issues and personality disorders amongst the prisoner population.

NIPS is seeking to respond to these challenges. However the figures demonstrate that the problem goes much wider than prisons. NIPS cannot meet this challenge alone and will need to rely the support and input of my Executive colleagues, in particular the Minister for Health, and other partners across the justice system and in the wider community.

NIPS continues to work in close partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which has lead responsibility in relation to the delivery of healthcare in prisons, to ensure that relevant and robust measures are in place to assess and, where necessary, provide additional support to persons entering custody.

Together with the Trust the Service is currently advancing a range of strategic measures to identify and better meet the needs of vulnerable prisoners, including:

- the appointment of a clinical educator to develop the skills base of staff working with vulnerable prisoners;
- the development of a closer working relationship with partners such as the Samaritans, particularly in relation to the Listener / Peer Support schemes for vulnerable prisoners;
- encouraging and facilitating stronger family links in partnership with NIACRO;
- the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process, which provides a robust procedure for the management of those persons identified as being at risk of self-harm or suicide; and
- the development of the REACH landing and a new OUTREACH day centre at Maghaberry, which is due to be handed over later this month, which will help to provide a therapeutic regime for our most vulnerable prisoners.

However, it will only be through reform of NIPS that we will be able to fundamentally change how the needs of vulnerable prisoners are met whilst in custody. That reform will be delivered through the Service's Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme, which is due to be launched on 28 June. Through the SEE Programme NIPS will see an increasing focus on getting the basics right; on becoming more efficient and effective; on professionally developing the role of prison officers; and on providing appropriate support and training to enable them to fill that role effectively in order to deliver custody which is safe, decent and secure, and which will provide appropriate interventions to support those in custody and to reduce the risk of reoffending.

Speeding: Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice how many speeding tickets were issued to motorists in the Carrickfergus Area Command in the 2010/11 financial year and what was the total amount raised.
(AQO 162/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information is not available in the format requested. There is no direct correlation between the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued and the revenue received for any given year.

The PSNI has advised that for the 2010/11 financial year there were a total of 2,068 speeding detections in Carrickfergus Area Command.

The NI Road Safety Partnership, which evolved from the amalgamation of the NI Safety Camera Scheme (SCS) and the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme, involves the PSNI, DOE, DRD (Roads Service) and DOJ. The Partnership is one of a number of measures supporting the Government's Road Safety Strategy 2010-20 towards casualty reduction on the roads of Northern Ireland.

In June 2010 a number of new mobile and fixed camera sites were designated in all areas, including Carrickfergus. The thresholds for speeding offences also changed in June 2010 and both initiatives will inevitably have led to an increase in detections and COFPNs. However, this increase is offset by the introduction of the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme which provides an opportunity for eligible offending speeding motorists to avoid penalty points and fine, by attending the Speed Awareness and Young Drivers schemes, educational courses specifically designed to increase road safety.

Police Ombudsman

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the independent review of the Police Ombudsman's Office following the allegations made by its former Chief Executive.
(AQO 163/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the allegations made by the Chief Executive of the Police Ombudsman's Office I commissioned Tony McCusker to conduct an investigation into the claims of interference by DOJ officials in OPONI business.

I received Tony McCusker's final report on Monday 20 June. I will be looking carefully at the report, reflecting on the findings and conclusions and considering the issues around publication.

I understand that Michael Maguire, the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice, is currently conducting his investigation into the relationship between the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, with a view to producing his report and presenting it to me by the end of June.

Department for Regional Development

Road Network Signage Contract

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what action has been taken to restore the road network signage contract which has not been in place for over 12 months, resulting in many road signs in the North Down area being in need of replacement or repair.

(AQW 526/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service, together with the Central Procurement Directorate of DFP, engaged in a public procurement tender competition for the Supply and Delivery of Permanent and Temporary Road Traffic Signs and Sign Posts, which was designed to have 21 contracts for the supply of traffic signs in place during August 2010.

However, a legal challenge prevented these contracts being awarded at that time. A lengthy court case ensued during which the majority of the time was taken up with allegations of bias against the Department. The judgement, made on 4 February 2011, cleared the Department completely of all the allegations of bias, however, on a technical point, the judge set aside three of the 21 contracts, and these will be retendered. Following the judgement, the Department awarded 15 contracts for traffic signs, including those for direction signs, in March of this year.

A backlog of sign requirements has built up following the legal action, which prevented the award of contracts as originally intended and this is being managed by my Department's Roads Service.

Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee: Road Entrance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has for another road entrance into the Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee.

(AQW 534/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to create another entrance into the Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee.

Flags and Advertisements on Street Light Posts

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) his Department's policy and the associated criteria used for permitting flags and advertisements on street light posts; and (ii) what steps are taken by his Department to punish offenders.

(AQW 539/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has signed up to the multi-agency Joint Protocol in Relation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas. Under the Protocol, Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached for their removal and where they are not easily accessible for the local community.

Under the Protocol, where the PSNI seeks to take action or initiates prosecution regarding flags issues, partner agencies will provide any evidential material they have to support such action or prosecution.

In relation to the unauthorised use of street light posts for displaying advertising signs, Article 87 of The Roads (NI) Order 1993 gives Roads Service authority to remove any signs erected without lawful authority in or on a road, and to recover any expenses reasonably incurred in doing so.

Cullybackey: Footpath at Dreen Road

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development when phase two of the works to the footpath at Dreen Road, Cullybackey, are due to commence.

(AQW 542/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a section of footway, approximately 250 metres in length, leading from Queens Park, along Dreen Road, towards Cullybackey was completed in early 2007. The continuation of this footway, to connect to the existing footway at the junction of Cardonagh Road, a length of approximately 300 meters, would involve significant land acquisition, extensive earthworks and the possible provision of retaining structures.

Roads Service has also learned of an outline planning application lodged by the North Eastern Education and Library Board, in June 2009, for a new secondary school at Dreen Road, in the vicinity of where any new footway extension would be located.

At a consultation with Planning Service in June 2009, Roads Service requested a Transport Assessment to address traffic issues associated with this type of development, which would include, among other matters, footway provision. To date, this has not been received.

A number of traffic management issues, including footway provision, will be given due consideration by Roads Service's Development Control Section, in respect of any new school proposal. In these circumstances, Road Service considers that it would be more appropriate to await the outcome of those deliberations, before any further action is considered on this footway proposal.

Narrow Water Bridge, Warrenpoint

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the development of the Narrow Water Bridge, Warrenpoint and whether he has any plans to make a statement on the issue.

(AQW 557/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that the Narrow Water Bridge proposal is being taken forward by Louth County Council and my Department has no direct involvement in this project, nor has it made any commitment to contribute funds to this scheme. In these circumstances, I do not consider it appropriate to make a statement on the issue.

Narrow Water Bridge, Warrenpoint

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the development of the Narrow Water Bridge, Warrenpoint.

(AQW 558/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that I have not had any discussions with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the development of the Narrow Water Bridge, Warrenpoint

As I advised the Member in my response to her previous question on this matter, (AQW557/11-15), the Narrow Water Bridge proposal is being taken forward by Louth County Council and my Department has no direct involvement in this project, nor has it made any commitment to contribute funds to it.

Road and Footpath Resurfacing Schemes

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what road and footpath resurfacing schemes are planned for the Lagan Valley area in the current financial year.

(AQW 562/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it develops its work programmes by Council area rather than on a constituency basis. Currently, work is ongoing to finalise the Roads Service's budget allocation for individual Council areas ahead of the presentation of work programmes to the respective Councils.

I understand that the Lagan Valley constituency covers areas from both the Banbridge and Lisburn Council areas. The work programme for Banbridge Council area will be contained in the Report to the Council, which will be presented at the Council meeting on 27 June. Details of the Report can be accessed from the Department's internet site at the following web address, after the meeting:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Due to the timing of the elections, Lisburn Council agreed that Roads Service will only attend the Autumn Council meeting during 2011. Therefore, a Council Report has not been produced for Lisburn Council area this Spring. However, I have included in the following table, a draft list of proposed road and footway improvements, which is provisional and subject to the confirmation of the various Roads Service budgets:

LISBURN COUNCIL AREA

Proposed Carriageway Resurfacing	Proposed Footway Resurfacing
A26 Moira Road at Chapel Hill	Saintfield Road from Mercer Street to the M1 roundabout
Listullycurran Road from Forthill Road to Ballygowan Road	Young Street from Sloan Street to Templar Avenue
Edenticullo Road	Riverside Drive
North Circular Road	Ferndell
Meeting Street, Moira from Main Street to Berwick View	Windeen
Harry's Road, Hillsborough near Eglantine Park	Harmony Drive
Tullyrusk Road from Budore Road to Tornagrough Road	Parkwood
Ballymacash Road/Glenavy Road, from Prince William Road to Penworth	Fairfield
Rushyhill Road from Ballycolin Road to Tornagrough Road	Tynedale Park
	Tynedale Crescent
	Malory Gardens

Severe Weather Conditions

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he or his predecessor has had in relation to preparations for any severe weather conditions this winter.

(AQW 602/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I cannot comment on discussions my predecessor may have had in relation to preparations for any severe weather conditions this winter.

However, I can confirm that I have received detailed briefing from my Department's Roads Service on the preparations being made for the coming winter. This included an update on the ongoing discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and at a local level, directly with Councils on the issue of gritting footpaths to encourage as many as possible to agree to provide this valuable service to their local ratepayers.

Immediately following the freeze/thaw incident during the December 2010/January 2011 period which led to major water supply interruptions for many consumers, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) submitted an action plan to my Department to amend its Major Incident Plan as a result of lessons learned for the remainder of the Winter period 2010/11. The amended Plan included, amongst other important areas, a new major event category of 'major emergency', improved communications and further development of website and call handling facilities to provide better information to customers.

Following publication of the investigation reports into the major incident which were commissioned by the Northern Ireland Executive and completed by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and two individual appointees, NI Water has produced an action plan to address all recommendations that are within its power and control arising from these investigation reports.

Public Transport: Fares

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to reducing or removing fares for people with a disability using public transport.

(AQW 616/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Free travel is currently only available to men and women aged 60 and over, people who are registered blind, and holders of a War Disablement Pension.

There are no plans at present to extend the provision of the Concessionary Fares Scheme. However, should resources become available in the future, I would be keen to provide free travel to those categories of people with disabilities currently in receipt of half-fare travel.

My Department also provides funding to the Door-To-Door transport scheme which provides low cost, local transport in 29 urban areas for people with disabilities or who cannot avail of mainstream public transport. The Rural Transport Fund also supports community transport groups to provide transport in rural areas to people with reduced mobility.

Traffic Light and Pedestrian Schemes: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what (i) traffic light schemes; and (ii) pedestrian schemes are planned for the North Down area in the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 621/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the 2012/13 Programme of Works for the North Down area is not yet available.

However, details of the 2011/12 Programme of Works for the North Down area, including traffic management and pedestrian measures, is contained in Council Report for North Down Area for Spring 2011 and can be accessed on the following website:

<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=7192>

NI Water

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development why NI Water (i) restructured its services in the Ballymena area, which resulted in six job losses in the Derry area; and (ii) moved the Craigavon managed metering services to Ballymena.

(AQW 633/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) following an efficiency review of its customer connections function, the work was streamlined and centralised in Ballymena to improve service delivery to developers. None of the customer connections work was undertaken in Londonderry, so there was no loss of jobs in that area as a result of the review.

With regard to (ii), the manager role for metering services, formerly based in Craigavon, became vacant in 2009 and the post was advertised internally as being available at one of a number of NIW locations in order to attract a wider pool of eligible applicants. The successful applicant's preferred location, and one that could organisationally be accommodated by NIW, was Ballymena.

NI Water: CEO

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) whether departmental officials were advised by the General Counsel and Company Secretary of NI Water, in June 2010, of concerns in relation to the CEO of NI Water; and (ii) if so, what action was taken by the departmental officials.

(AQW 634/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Any such information would be deemed sensitive personal information under the terms of the Data Protection Act. Thus, without prejudice to this question or any other request for similar information, and in accordance with the legislation I can neither confirm nor deny the situation referred to.

On-Street Parking Charges

Mr Hilditch asked Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider reviewing the proposal to introduce on-street parking charges in provincial towns, particularly on Bank Holidays, in order to attract visitors.

(AQW 638/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am currently carrying out a review of my Department's proposal to introduce new on-street parking charges in towns and cities across Northern Ireland. I intend to make an announcement on this issue in due course.

I can further advise that for locations where on-street charges already apply, charges are not enforced on the following public holidays:

- New Year's Day (or day in lieu);
- Easter Monday;
- 12th and 13th July (or days in lieu); and
- 25th and 26th December (or days in lieu).

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 639/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At this stage I intend to introduce the following items of legislation during 2011/12:

- The Belfast International Airport (Control Over Land) Order (NI)
- The Coleraine (Transfer of Harbour Undertaking) Order (NI)
- Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI),
- Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Application for Exemption Orders) Regulations,
- Railways (Safety Management) (Amendment) Regulations,
- The Passenger Right's and Obligations (Exemptions) Regulations,
- Train Driving Licences and Certificates (Amendment) Regulations.
- Approximately 140 x traffic regulations, roads, road races and abandonment orders.

2012/13

Approximately 140 Secondary items of legislation covering traffic regulations, roads, road races and abandonment orders.

2013/14

Approximately 140 Secondary items of legislation covering traffic regulations, roads, road races and abandonment orders.

2014/15

Approximately 140 Secondary items of legislation covering traffic regulations, roads, road races and abandonment orders.

Departmental legislation programmes are continuously under review and tailored to meet business, health and safety, EU and any other requirements.

Traffic-calming Measures

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for the (i) Carrickfergus; and (ii) Larne areas in 2011/12.

(AQW 669/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, subject to the successful completion of the legislative processes, it plans to construct traffic calming measures in the following areas of Carrickfergus during 2011/12 financial year:

- Alexander Road - incorporating Dromore Road, Trailcock Road, Castleburn Road, Carrickburn Road and Downshire Gardens;
- Prospect Heights - incorporating Sandringham Heights and Windslow Heights; and
- Station Road, Greenisland, which will include Upper Station Road.

In relation to the Larne area, my Department's Roads Service has advised that Traffic Calming measures, in the form of road humps, have already been introduced on part of the Linn Road. Enhanced warning signage, incorporating flashing lights and additional road markings, will also be provided on the approaches to Linn Primary School and Ballycarry Primary School.

Further traffic calming measures are also planned for Upper Cairncastle Road following completion of resurfacing works, which is programmed for August/September 2011.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 684/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below contains details of expenditure on renting storage space in each of the past three financial years by my Department. The table captures details of all expenditure related to storage rental including new additions to storage, record retrievals and returns to storage:

Financial Year	Expenditure £
2010-11	4,179.40
2009-10	6,472.12
2008-09	4,286.19

Public Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to encourage or incentivise the use of public transport by people with a disability.

(AQW 689/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is continuing to implement its Accessible Transport Strategy through a series of Action Plans aimed at enabling people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.

The current Action Plan includes a number of measures designed to encourage or incentivise the use of public transport by people with disabilities including better awareness training for transport staff, improvements to services, infrastructure and information provision and research on the uptake of concessionary fares.

Additionally the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities with an annual budget of £4.6 million provides support to services such as Shopmobility and the Door-to-Door transport scheme; and

The Rural Transport Fund, with an annual budget of £4.75 million provides support to Rural Community Transport Partnerships and Translink to offer a range of transport services to people with reduced mobility, including those with disabilities, living in rural areas across Northern Ireland.

My Department also continues to make substantial funding available to enable Translink to improve the accessibility of its services. This includes the purchase of new low floor buses, upgrading of railway stations with ramps and halts and the purchase of new accessible trains.

On 15 June 2011 I launched a Travel Safe Guide for people with learning disabilities. This Guide has been developed in partnership with a number of stakeholders as a learning tool to help people with learning disabilities how to travel safely and independently on public transport.

My officials continue to work closely with transport providers and representative groups such as IMTAC to address transport accessibility issues for both older people and people with a disability

Newcastle: Sewerage Infrastructure

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) the works planned for the sewerage infrastructure in Newcastle; and (ii) when these works will be completed.

(AQW 743/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has undertaken a substantial programme of sewer network improvements in Newcastle and all work has been completed with the exception of the Castlepark Storm Retention Tank which is scheduled for completion later this year.

To ensure compliance with the revised Bathing Water Directive, NI Water is also planning to upgrade the existing wastewater treatment works at the harbour area. The project, which is currently at tender stage, is scheduled to commence on site in November 2011 with completion expected by May 2013.

Unadopted Roads in Private Housing Estates

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to hold discussions with the National House-Building Council about developers who have been unable to complete roads in private housing estates.

(AQW 773/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I currently do not have any firm plans to hold discussions with the National House-Building Council (NHBC), regarding developers who have been unable to complete roads in private housing estates.

However, I can advise that my Department's Roads Service recently met with NHBC's Regional Director for Northern Ireland to discuss such issues, including the use of road bonds to complete roads in housing developments, where the developer is unable to carry out the work.

Proposed A5 Dual Carriageway Project

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development when he will announce his decision on whether he will proceed with the proposed A5 dual carriageway project.

(AQW 789/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A5 scheme is currently the subject of a Public Inquiry. It is expected that the Independent Inspector's Report of the Public Inquiry will be presented to the Department before the end of this year.

I therefore intend to consider the Independent Inspector's report and proposed investment levels across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme, before making any announcement on the proposed scheme.

Water Treatment Works

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of complaints his Department has received from (a) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and (b) the public, and others, in relation to the spreading of material from Water Treatment Works; and (ii) what plans there are to address this issue.

(AQW 797/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not received any complaints in relation to the spreading of material from Water Treatment Works.

I am advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the residuals from the water treatment process are no longer spread on land owned by it but disposed of to licensed landfill sites. In the past two years NIW received only one complaint from a member of the public about the practice of spreading water treatment residuals on its land.

Rail Halt at Culmore, Portstewart and Downhill, Castlerock

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to provide a rail halt at (i) Culmore, Portstewart; and (ii) Downhill, Castlerock.

(AQW 798/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within their current Capital Plan for a rail halt at (i) Culmore, Portstewart and (ii) Downhill, Castlerock. There are no current plans for such halts to be developed within existing budgets as agreed at Executive level. Translink's priority at this point is to ensure essential safety works are carried out between Coleraine and Londonderry over the next two years. Budgetary provision has been secured for this project.

Traffic-calming Measures

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce traffic calming measures on the Maybuoy Road, Garvagh and the St Columba's Park area in Garvagh.

(AQW 799/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Mayboy Road and St Columba's Park, Garvagh, do not meet the criteria for consideration for traffic calming measures, as the roads are not within an urban area. Therefore, Roads Service has no plans to introduce traffic calming measures at these locations.

Defective or Negligent Roads and Footpaths

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how much compensation has been paid to claimants for (i) personal injuries; and (ii) damage to vehicles as a result of defective or negligent roads and footpaths in each of the last two years.

(AQW 800/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The particulars of the compensation payments are set out in the table below.

Year	Personal Injury Compensation Roads	Personal Injury Compensation Footpaths	Vehicle Damage Compensation Roads	Vehicle Damage Compensation Footpaths
2009/10	£872,297.11	£772,277.43	£201,980.14	£11,601.77
2010/11	£1,009,088.41	£892,596.37	£301,231.42	£2,230.74

Grit Boxes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the criteria used to determine the location of a grit box; and whether he has any plans to review or change the criteria.

(AQW 807/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self help basis, on roads which do not qualify for inclusion onto the gritting schedule, providing the necessary criteria are met. There are no limits placed on the number of salt bins which may be provided, although they will not normally be provided within 100m of another bin.

Roads Service will consider the provision of a salt bin when the following criteria are met:

- the location in question must be on the publically maintained road network;
- the gradient of the road in question must be over 5%;
- no reasonable alternative route shall be available; and
- the subject road attains a minimum overall score, derived using a specific formula, where points are awarded depending on road geometry, residential usage, community welfare and commercial usage.

Salt boxes can also be provided to schools that are regularly affected by severe wintry weather.

New bins will not be provided unless requested by a member of the public, who also agrees to spread the salt provided.

You will appreciate Roads Service already commits significant resources to maintain approximately 4,200 salt bins provided on public roads which represents an increase of over 700 over the last two seasons.

In light of the significant level of resources already deployed, and based on the fact that the number of salt bins is increasing significantly to deal with public demand, I currently have no plans to review the criteria used for the placement of grit boxes.

Ballyholme Beach in Bangor

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps NI Water is taking to ensure that the problems relating to the water quality at Ballyholme Beach in Bangor are permanently resolved.

(AQW 831/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that following the introduction of the new North Down/Ards Wastewater Treatment Works at Donaghadee, an investment of £44m, NIW is focussing on the upgrade of the sewerage infrastructure in the Bangor area. NIW has already carried out improvement work to sewage pumping stations in the Ballyholme area and over the next three years it plans to invest approximately £7m on a capital works programme to upgrade and rationalise combined sewer overflows in the wider Bangor catchment at Carnalea, Rathmore Stream, Bangor Marina, Seacliff, Clandeboye Stream, Lukes Point and Orlock/Sandeel. While NIW cannot address the impact of agricultural runoff to streams, and ultimately to the foreshore, it believes that the comprehensive programme of pumping station and sewer upgrades, along with ongoing maintenance

improvements will make a significant improvement to water quality at Ballyholme and the coastal area in the general vicinity.

On-Street Car Parking Charges

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed on-street car parking charges for town centres.

(AQW 842/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I have initiated a review of the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

I intend to announce my decision in due course.

Street Furniture

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) his Department's policy on the removal of advertising material and cable ties from road signs, traffic lights and lamp posts; (ii) how often this street furniture is cleaned; and (iii) whether it is intended to clean street furniture more regularly in areas visited by a high number of tourists.

(AQW 861/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that advertising hoardings are normally subject to planning application and any infringements of planning laws would normally be pursued under the relevant planning legislation.

Where advertising hoardings are erected illegally in or on a road, Roads Service has the powers to remove and to recover any expenses that it reasonably incurs in doing so, under Article 87 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

Roads Service carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways to ensure that essential maintenance works are identified and completed as necessary. During these inspections all defects are noted, including for example, defective signs and signs requiring cleaning to improve their visibility. The frequency of these inspections depends on the type of road and the volume of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Town centres and major traffic routes are inspected monthly, while all other roads and footways are inspected at either two or four monthly intervals.

These standards were last reviewed in 2006 and are still deemed to be appropriate. There are currently no plans to alter these arrangements in areas visited by high numbers of tourists.

Bruce Street and Holmes Street, Belfast: Yellow Lines

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to remove, where possible, the single and double yellow lines on Bruce Street and Holmes Street, Belfast, to allow for extra city centre parking.

(AQW 862/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to remove the existing waiting restrictions on Bruce Street or Holmes Street in order to provide extra city centre parking.

Parking Fines

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been generated from parking fines in the (i) Carrickfergus; and (ii) Larne areas since January 2011.

(AQW 864/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that income from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) is not compiled on a town by town basis. However, I can advise that total PCN income from 1

Jan 2011 to 31 May 2011 was £1.91 million, with 1.0% of all PCNs issued in Larne and 1.4% of all PCNs issued in Carrickfergus.

Reservoirs in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development which reservoirs in the North Down area are owned by his Department.

(AQW 905/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it owns the following reservoirs in the North Down area.

Reservoir Name	Location
Hollywood High Impounding	Church Road, Hollywood
Creightons Green Impounding	Whinney Hill, Hollywood
Ballysallagh Upper	Ballysallagh Rd., Craigantlet
Ballysallagh Lower	Millbrook Rd., Craigantlet
Conlig Low Impounding (old)	Main St, Conlig
Conlig Lower Impounding	Old Bangor Rd, Conlig
Portavo Impounding	Orlock Rd, Groomsport

Easibus Service

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to review the decision to discontinue the Easibus service by 2014.

(AQW 1034/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Easibus services in Bangor and Londonderry were discontinued in June 2010. This decision was based on an assessment of alternative services provided by Translink and the existence of Door-to-Door services provided under contract. At this time I have no plans to review this decision. No decision has been made to discontinue Easibus services in Belfast by 2014 and the Department continues to provide support to Translink for services in that location.

Any review of Easibus Belfast will take into account usage levels and the existence of other Translink and Door-to-Door services to ensure the most efficient and effective use of public expenditure to meet customer demand for transport schemes used by people with disabilities and those with reduced mobility. It will also take account of Translink financial and service plans generally, which are reviewed annually.

NI Water

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he intends to have with NI Water in relation to introducing an exemption/compensation allowance for customers who received high bills for the period covering 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, as a result of the severe weather during December 2010 and January 2011.

(AQW 1061/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are many recommendations coming out of the Freeze/Thaw report which Northern Ireland Water (NIW) is implementing and I am following progress in all those areas identified. However, this is an operational matter for NIW. The allowances available to customers in respect of supply pipe leakages are set out in the company's "Scheme of Charges" (5.25-5.29 of 2011/12) which is approved by the Utility Regulator. It is important that customers with meters regularly check them to detect any leakage. As the freeze/thaw incident demonstrated, unchecked leakage can have very dramatic consequences for the entire network. NIW has assured me that it will work with customers

who have received exceptionally large bills in a sympathetic manner, with a view to reaching a mutually agreed repayment profile.

Water Supply for the Knockalossoet to Corranry Area in Rosslea, Co. Fermanagh

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for an update on plans to alleviate the intermittent and low pressure water supply for the Knockalossoet to Corranry area in Rosslea, Co. Fermanagh; and (ii) when this work will start and finish.

(AQW 1075/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a water distribution Zonal Study, carried out for area serving Knockalossoet to Corranry recommended dividing the existing distribution area into two supply sections. This will be undertaken by construction of a new booster pumping station, the extension of the watermain, and the installation of a number of new boundary valves. This will permit a more sustainable supply of water to the existing lower lying properties, with the other higher lying properties receiving improved water pressure through the booster station. The civil work has been added to an existing contract being undertaken in the Tyrone/Fermanagh areas and has been classified as "high priority" to be advanced in the contractor's programme of work. Subject to receiving statutory approvals from Northern Ireland Electricity, Roads Service and Planning Service, it is expected that work will start on site in October this year and that the infrastructure will be operational before the winter.

Roads: Maintenance

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department and Roads Service intend to address the roads structural maintenance backlog.

(AQO 172/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would like to reassure the Member that the maintenance of road and footway surfaces and their underlying structure continues to be a high priority for my Department's Roads Service. However, there are many pressures on the resources available and the road maintenance programme must compete for funding along with the many other Departmental spending programmes.

At 2011 prices, £116.5 million per annum is required to maintain the structural integrity of the entire network at frequencies in line with good practice. The structural maintenance budget for 2011/12 is currently estimated at £88 million, leaving a shortfall of £28.5million.

Roads Service officials acknowledge that unplanned reactive patching work of road surfaces does not provide good value for money. Nonetheless, in the short term, such work is essential to maintain the serviceability of roads and footways, where localised failures occur.

It is widely recognised that an optimum level of expenditure on reactive patching would be in the region of a tenth of the structural maintenance budget. The current level of expenditure on reactive maintenance would not, therefore be considered to be sustainable, as the cost of relatively expensive patching to avoid public liability claims and maintain road safety, is drawing scarce funds away from better value for money resurfacing and surface dressing activities.

It is difficult to estimate how the level of patching would increase if the underinvestment in structural maintenance continues. This is because, as the level of underfunding and backlog increases, the rate of deterioration and the need for patching is also likely to increase. The numbers of public liability claims and their associated costs are also likely to increase.

Of course, it is always the case that if additional funding was available, more maintenance work would be carried out, but I can assure the Member that Roads Service will continue to make strong bids for additional structural maintenance funds. In the meantime, Roads Service will continue to make the best use of resources available to it to develop and maintain the road network.

A32 Omagh to Enniskillen

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the three proposed major road schemes on the A32.

(AQO 174/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has developed a strategy to improve the A32 route between Omagh and Enniskillen through a series of road improvements to be undertaken on a rolling programme. The highest priority schemes, identified within the current programme, are at Drumskinny, Shannaragh and Cornamuck, which together represent a capital investment of £13.5 million on this route.

Advance site works were undertaken on a 0.9 km on-line widening scheme at Drumskinny in the 2009/2010 financial year. It is anticipated that a contract for the remainder of the works can be awarded in September of this year with a view to completion by the end of the current financial year.

At Shannaragh, design work is substantially complete on a 2.2 km off-line realignment scheme and the procurement process is now underway with a view to awarding a contract for construction in December of this year.

Design work is also well advanced on the third scheme, a 1.4 km off-line improvement at Cornamuck. Timing of the works will be dependent upon the availability of funds.

There has also been significant progress on the A32 Cherrymount Link Road in Enniskillen. Tender submissions for the completion contract were due for return on or before 16 June 2011. It is hoped to award the contract in September to facilitate the completion of the works before the end of the 2012/2013 financial year.

Roads Service remains committed to delivering a programme of improvement works along this route. However, the timing of further works will be dependent on the extent of subsequent funding allocations to my Department.

Water Supply

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take to ensure that water supplies are at minimum risk of disruption during the coming winter months.

(AQO 175/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As Minister I have responsibility for the policy and legislative framework and for appointing the Northern Ireland Water Board to deliver water and sewerage services. Under the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006, operational matters are the responsibility of NI Water.

After the major incident over the Christmas 2010/New Year 2011 period which led to water supply interruptions for many consumers, NI Water has amended its Major Incident Plan as a result of lessons learnt. It is implementing the relevant recommendations of the review into the incident and has already made significant improvements to its communications capacity.

The implementation of these actions will allow NI Water to be better prepared for similar weather events and will reduce the risk of interruptions to the water supply. Of course, no action could completely ensure that there was no risk to supplies given a repeat of the severity of last winter's weather.

Park-and-Ride Facilities: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase park and ride facilities in the East Antrim area, adjacent to the Larne railway line.

(AQO 176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are plans to provide over 60 spaces at a Park and Ride facility at Jordanstown Station. This project is currently being assessed by Translink and will be subject to approval by my Department.

There is also a newly completed Park and Ride facility at Carrickfergus. This has increased capacity from 126 to 295 spaces. This represents a significant investment and greatly increased capacity at this popular location.

In order to be effective Park and Ride should not be considered in isolation but must be part of an integrated transport strategy which takes account of the long-term transport needs and priorities. In support of the review of the Regional Transportation Strategy, my Department is therefore carrying out a strategic review of Park and Ride facilities with the aim of developing proposals for future provision, which would offer the best prospect of maximising modal shift. Whilst the review is in its final stages and the Department has secured some funding in its budget for Park and Ride, as with all areas, the implementation of Park and Ride will be taken forward in a more constrained budgetary context and this may impact on the ability to deliver priority projects that may be identified in the review.

Compensation Claims

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to reduce the legal costs involved in compensation claims made against his Department.

(AQO 177/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department receives approximately 4,500 claims every year. It is the Department's policy to robustly defend any case that it does not consider justified, and indeed almost three-quarters of all claims are successfully defended. Where possible the Department will always seek to recover legal defence costs from unsuccessful claimants. Where there is no defence it is our policy to settle claims at as early a stage as possible and also at the lowest cost in both terms of compensation and other related costs.

The Department has a single Service Level Agreement with the Departmental Solicitor's Office. This agreement provides for the monitoring of both the quality and cost of legal services provided to the Department.

Ballynahinch Bypass

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Roads Service's plans to construct a bypass for Ballynahinch.

(AQO 178/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As Minister for Regional Development, I am determined to ensure that there are improvements across the Strategic Road Network, which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money.

On that basis, I intend to consider the proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme, and to explore opportunities to bring forward schemes, such as the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass proposal.

Department for Social Development

Urban Regeneration Company ILEX

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how much public money has been spent on salaries, maintenance, capital costs, legal costs and other associated expenditure in relation to the urban regeneration company ILEX since its inception to 31 March 2011.

(AQW 497/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Information on how much public money has been spent on salaries, maintenance, capital costs, legal costs and other associated expenditure in relation to the urban regeneration company Ilex since its inception to 31 March 2011 is summarised in the table below. All figures are shown in thousands (£'000's).

	2003/04 £'000	2004/05 £'000	2005/06 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	Total £'000
Salaries	59	317	343	556	690	777	1,034	998	4,773
Maintenance	12	3	1	5	0	0	0	0	21
Capital Costs	99	5	38	3	8	1,827	4,481	3,850	10,312
Legal Costs	7	13	8	32	9	22	61	25	176
Other Associated Expenditure	288	1,299	1,474	1,636	2,903	1,704	2,366	3,149	14,818
Total Public Funding	467	1,637	1,863	2,232	3,610	4,329	7,941	8,022	30,101

Notes

Ilex is a non-departmental public body funded by my Department and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The public monies reported include my Department and OFMDFM funding. All figures up to 2009/10 reflect the amounts as published in Ilex's annual statutory accounts, with 2010/11 figures based upon Ilex's management accounts.

During the financial years 2008/09- 2010/11, Ilex managed capital works at Fort George and Ebrington to a total value of £10,105K which were classed as 'Assets Under Construction' by my Department & OFMDFM. These costs are included in the 'capital costs' figure in the table above.

In addition to the above, £13,023K was spent on the Peace (Foot & Cycle) bridge across the River Foyle under the Shared Space programme of PEACE III. Of the total costs, my Department has contributed £2,075K to this project in match funding up to 31 March 2011.

Rural Priority Areas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development what additional help is available to tackle rural unfitness and disrepair in the ten wards which were identified by the Housing Executive as Rural Priority Areas.

(AQW 571/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there is no longer any additional assistance specifically available for Rural Priority Areas due to the reduced level of funding for the Private Sector Grants system. Discretionary grants are still available for dealing with unfitness but these are awarded on the basis of exceptional circumstances only, regardless of the geographic location. Mandatory grants, such as Disabled Facilities Grants and statutory Repair Grants continue to be available across Northern Ireland.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 625/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total amount spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years is detailed below.

Financial Year	£
2008-09	17,899.12

Financial Year	£
2009-10	23,329.37
2010-11	20,718.24

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 641/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In terms of primary legislation, I anticipate introducing, subject to Executive approval, Bills in relation to Pensions and Welfare Reform in 2011/12 along with a Bill on Shop Opening Hours. I will also be considering legislation in a number of areas including housing, further reform of gambling and liquor licensing in the following years. Throughout 2011/12 and the remainder of the mandate I will also bring forward a range of subordinate legislation in relation to social security, housing and urban regeneration.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who applied for Disability Living Allowance in the (i) North Down; and (ii) Ards areas were refused the benefit in each of the last five years.

(AQW 721/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available. The data for Disability Living Allowance refusals/disallowances is held on the Department for Work and Pensions IT Systems and is only available on a Northern Ireland wide basis. This information is provided in the table below. The data cannot be broken down by Local Council area as the Department for Work and Pensions IT Systems are not configured to capture refusals/disallowances in the same manner as it does for those in receipt of benefit.

Year	Number disallowed DLA
2006/07	13,891
2007/08	16,992
2008/09	15,277
2009/10	14,539
2010/11	12,500
Total	73,199

Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were claiming (i) Job Seekers Allowance; and (ii) Income Support for the years ending (a) April 2005; (b) April 2006; (c) April 2007; (d) April 2008; (e) April 2009; (f) April 2010; and (g) April 2011 in the districts of (i) Magherafelt; (ii) Cookstown; (iii) Dungannon; (iv) Omagh; and (v) Strabane.

(AQW 732/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the tables below.

TABLE 1: JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE

District Council Area	April 2005	April 2006	April 2007	April 2008	April 2009	April 2010	April 2011
Cookstown	356	373	331	341	884	1090	1006
Dungannon	537	456	420	481	1409	1619	1737
Magherafelt	325	348	265	299	985	1128	1046
Omagh	795	737	627	620	1240	1531	1587
Strabane	1012	1085	996	1010	1383	1602	1743

TABLE 2: INCOME SUPPORT

District Council Area	April 2005	April 2006	April 2007	April 2008	April 2009	April 2010	April 2011
Cookstown	2028	1951	1859	1752	1715	1593	1514
Dungannon	3141	3045	2987	2829	2704	2517	2390
Magherafelt	1689	1629	1598	1513	1533	1414	1306
Omagh	3076	2990	2924	2896	2851	2649	2531
Strabane	3216	3112	3078	2992	2893	2732	2582

Housing Executive Properties

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties have been boarded up and unused for over 6 months in each district.

(AQW 756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties that have been boarded up and unused for over six months in each Housing Executive district.

District	Boarded Up Over 6 Months
West Belfast	12
East Belfast	4
North Belfast	70
Shankill	164
South Belfast	322
Area Total	572
Bangor	7
N'ards	27
Castlereagh	0
Lisburn (Antrim St)	7
Lisburn (Diary Farm)	0
Downpatrick	5
Area Total	46

District	Boarded Up Over 6 Months
Banbridge	0
Newry	0
Armagh	0
Lurgan/Brownlow	91
Portadown	1
Dungannon	3
Fermanagh	4
Area Total	99
Ballymena	9
Antrim	1
N'abbey 1	0
N'abbey 2	0
Carrick	0
Larne	91
Ballycastle	0
Ballymoney	0
Coleraine	0
Area Total	101
Waterloo Place	0
Waterside	1
Collon Tce	0
Limavady	0
Magherafelt	0
Strabane	0
Omagh	1
Cookstown	0
Area Total	2
NI. Total	820

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the (i) age; (ii) condition; and (iii) profile of a Housing Executive property is taken into consideration when deciding when a work scheme should commence.

(AQW 774/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that its planned maintenance programme considers age, condition and profile, as well as a number of other factors. In general, the criteria considered for their major works programmes is as follows:-

- Heating – priority is given to those homes which do not have programmable heating, mainly room heaters and open fires. Economy 7 appliances may also be included to address fuel poverty issues. Gas/oil boilers have a life expectancy of 15 years and this is also considered when developing programmes.
- Kitchens – are programmed based on a life expectancy of 20 years. Condition and space/layout are also considered.
- Health and safety – these programmes address health and safety issues as well as legislative requirements. Recent examples include asbestos removal, carbon monoxide detectors, smoke alarms and fire doors.
- Special schemes – these address other issues such as re-roofing, lift replacement and are initiated when an element has exceeded its life expectancy.

The level of work in a particular category is dependant on the amount of finance available

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria are used to prioritise external work schemes for Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 775/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the main criteria used to prioritise external work schemes is as follows:-

- Requirement to wind and weatherproof all Housing Executive properties
- Condition of particular elements such as windows
- Age of the property
- Repairs/maintenance history of the property
- Feedback from residents

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive requires properties with self-contained flats which have been created by conversion to be registered as houses of multiple-occupancy regardless of whether they are occupied by one person or a married couple.

(AQW 785/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A house is regarded as in multiple occupation if it is a person's main residence and is occupied by more than two persons not of the same family. Where a house has been converted into self contained flats, it is still considered a "house" for the purposes of multiple occupation however it will only be registered under the Housing Executive's HMO registration scheme if there are more than two persons living there who are not part of the same family unit.

Belcoo, County Fermanagh: Former Police Station

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact his decision to remove house building powers from certain Housing Associations will have on the redevelopment of the former police station in Belcoo, County Fermanagh.

(AQW 877/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The proposed scheme on the site of the former PSNI building at 9 Main Street, Belcoo for 8 general needs units of accommodation was previously programmed to be delivered by Helm Housing Association.

Following Helm's suspension from the Social Housing Development Programme the Housing Executive are in the process of nominating another Housing Association to take the scheme forward for delivery during 2011/12.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Northern Ireland Assembly Website

Mr Kinahan asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the progress made on the development of a new Assembly website and a timescale for its delivery; and (ii) what plans it has to (a) extend the search options available to the public through the Assembly Website for Assembly Questions, and other Plenary business; and (b) create search options for the Official Report.

(AQW 567/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) The project to redevelop the Assembly website aims to provide a site that is modern, fresh and engaging with dynamic content that will improve the user experience.

Following comprehensive consultation and research with internal and external stakeholders the design phase of the project was completed earlier this year. The procurement of a content management system that will be used to publish content to the website is nearing completion.

This system will streamline and improve how the Assembly's information is published on the website allowing individual business areas to edit, update and maintain their own content. The current timescale for delivery of the new website is in the autumn this year.

- (ii) A key part of the project to redevelop the Assembly website is its integration with the Assembly Information Management System (AIMS) which will allow visitors to the Assembly website to take advantage of the search options for Assembly Questions etc. that is currently only available to those inside the Assembly and will also be used to publish the Official Report to the website when that part of AIMS is released. It is therefore anticipated that the new website will offer a better search solution for all users.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 1 July 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Funding for Victims' Groups

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the core funding for many victims groups expired on 31 March 2011, to detail the reasons for the gap in payments to those groups under the Strategic Support Fund.

(AQW 94/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): There will be no gap in funding for groups under the Strategic Support fund. Groups have been notified of their awards for the 2011/2012 financial year.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by their Department during the 2007-11 mandate; (ii) the number of requests answered within the stipulated time; (iii) the number of instances in which the Information Commissioner had to intervene; (iv) the number of requests which remain outstanding; (v) the average time taken to answer a request; and (vi) the longest time taken to answer a request.

(AQW 114/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In answer to your question:

- (i) 564
- (ii) 422
- (iii) The Information Commissioner has been asked to intervene on 11 occasions.
- (iv) 35
- (v) The Department does not hold this information
- (vi) 192 days.

Victims and Survivors' Service

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of the Victims and Survivors Service.

(AQW 194/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is anticipated that we will have the Victims and Survivors Service established as an organisation with key personnel in post by autumn 2011.

Work has been ongoing within the Department this year in taking forward the design element of the Service. Progress has been made in the areas of individual assessment, management information systems, evaluation mechanisms, service delivery and standards. A recruitment plan for the Service has been developed. A business case exploring all of the potential options for the organisational model

of the Service has been drafted and is in the process of obtaining the necessary approvals. The agreed model will be implemented following final approval.

Significant changes have already been made this year to the funding schemes for individual victims and victims groups, to move them towards a needs-based approach in preparation for establishment of the Victims and Survivors Service.

While the process of developing the Service is ongoing, we will continue to deliver support and resources to the sector. We have allocated £50 million to meet the needs of victims and survivors over the next 4 years.

Consultancy Procurement

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken to strengthen expenditure approval processes in their Department, and its arm's-length bodies, particularly in relation to consultancy procurement; and the reason for any such changes.

(AQW 474/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Policy and procedures for the approval of spend, including consultancy spend, have been reissued to all staff in OFMDFM and its Arms Length Bodies by the Accounting Officer. Refresher training on the preparation of economic appraisals and the approval requirements for spending proposals is also being delivered to staff.

All Departmental proposals for the use of consultants with a value of £10,000 or more require the approval of the Accounting Officer, Ministers, and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). The consultancy delegation available to OFMDFM's Arms Length Bodies has correspondingly been reduced to £5,000, with the exception of the Strategic Investment Board which is subject to separate controls.

A Casework Sub-Committee of the OFMDFM Departmental Board exercises a review, challenge, and approval role in relation to spending proposals with a cumulative value of £1 million or greater over a three-year period, and/or which require the approval of DFP

The skills base of Departmental staff is also being strengthened through the addition of specialist staff from audit, economics, and accounting backgrounds.

These steps have been taken in response to identified weaknesses in the approval processes in OFMDFM and its Arm's-Length Bodies following reviews undertaken by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and DFP, and the Department's internal test drilling exercise on the preparation of economic appraisals.

Victims and Survivors' Groups' Core Funding Scheme 2010/12

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the groups who applied to the 2010/12 Victims and Survivors Groups' Core Funding Scheme; (ii) those groups which were successful; (iii) the amount of funding they received; and (iv) when they received the funding.

(AQW 570/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Core Funding Scheme for groups working with victims and survivors ended on 31 March 2011. It was replaced by the Strategic Support Fund. Victims groups could choose to apply to one of two application windows for support under the Strategic Support Fund: an 18-month programme of funding beginning 1 October 2010 or a 12-month programme of funding beginning 1 April 2011. There was no open application process for victims groups to apply to the Core Funding Scheme as this funding stream had been rolled forward on a yearly basis since it was established in 2003.

Public Assemblies Parades and Protest Body

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why their departmental budget allocation provides £2.2 million in 2013-14 and £2.39 million in 2014-15 for a Public Assemblies Parades and Protest Body when such a body has been rejected and is not provided for in legislation.

(AQW 696/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are committed, as outlined in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement of 5 February 2010, to establish a new and improved framework for the management and regulation of public assemblies, including parades and related protests.

It is our desire to proceed with this work by consensus of the key stakeholders during the course of this budget period. It is therefore prudent to plan and budget for any associated costs that may be incurred and these are currently recorded under the title of the Public Parades and Protest Body. If this is not realised, the funding can be redistributed in the in-year budget process monitoring.

We will continue to review our Budget plans, and the underlying assumptions underpinning those plans through the course of the four-year Budget period.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Groups: Budget Earmarked for

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of their Department's budget for their four year term is currently earmarked for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

(AQW 725/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is no current budget allocation earmarked for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

Procurement

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 477/11-15, to list the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 878/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below details the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action and the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer.

SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS SINCE MAY 2007 WITH NO PRIOR ACCOUNTING OFFICER APPROVAL

Financial Year	Single Tender Action	Name of Supplier	Expenditure £	Accounting Officer Approval
2008-09	Safeguarding Policy	NSPCC	13,510	01/08/2007
2008-09	Consultation of Parents	Parents' Advice Centre	4,500	03/03/2008
2008-09	Public Appointment Survey	IPSOS	6,965	26/02/2009
2008-09	Review of Capital Asset Realisation Taskforce	Ed Vernon	51,750	04/02/2009
2009-10	Play and Leisure Policy	Playboard	270,000	24/03/2011

Financial Year	Single Tender Action	Name of Supplier	Expenditure £	Accounting Officer Approval
2010-11	NI Water Investigation	P Holder & H Moorhead	24,500	14/01/2011
2010-11	Software Licence and telephone support	Acorn IT Solutions Ltd	2,150	Retrospective approval to be sought
2010-11	Software Maintenance	Acorn IT Solutions Ltd	341	Retrospective approval to be sought
		Total Expenditure	£373,716	

North/South Parliamentary Forum

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on establishing the North/South Parliamentary Forum.

(AQW 885/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The establishment of the North South Parliamentary Forum is primarily a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas. At the NSMC Plenary meeting held on 10 June Ministers noted the intention of the Ceann Comhairle and the Speaker to hold a joint meeting of the Working Groups in Dublin on 23 June 2011.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish the findings of Sir Jon Shortridge's investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant in the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 889/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The investigation commissioned by the Head of the NI Civil Service and carried out by Sir Jon Shortridge was part of an internal Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) management process as part of its disciplinary policy.

In accordance with the disciplinary policies and procedures contained in the NICS Human Resources Handbook and the obligations placed on employers by data protection legislation, the contents of Sir Jon's report will not be published. This was set out in letters sent by the Head of the NI Civil Service to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Chair of the Regional Development Committee.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to date, who has been informed of the findings of Sir Jon Shortridge's investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant; and whether any Members of the Public Accounts Committee were informed of the decision to demote this senior civil servant prior to members of the press being informed.

(AQW 890/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Only people directly involved in the disciplinary process were aware of the findings of the Sir Jon Shortridge investigation.

The Head of the NI Civil Service informed the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Chair of the Regional Development Committee on the morning of 13 June 2011 of the outcome of the disciplinary process. No one else was informed prior to this.

Seven Principles of Public Life

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration was given to the 'Seven Principles of Public Life' in the recent disciplinary action taken against the former Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 923/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Head of the NI Civil Service has advised us that he took the 'Seven Principles of Public Life' into consideration as part of the disciplinary process. The process was carried out in accordance with the disciplinary policies and procedures contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources Handbook.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which they intend to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 989/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There have been five departmental initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from a Republic of Ireland Government Department, agency or nongovernmental organisation. The details are shown in the table below:

Details of Project, Scheme or Initiative	Name of ROI Government Department or Agency or Nongovernmental Organisations	Branch Name	Year
North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI)	Contact primarily with the Department of Foreign Affairs but the initiative involves most Departments north and south to varying degrees.	North South East West Team (NSEWT), OFMDFM	Initiated 2005 and re-launched 2008 following suspension
Establishment of the Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland. OFMDFM research branch official attended meetings of the steering group. Steering group had circa 30 members mainly academics and third sector organisations but also ROI civil servants.	Centre for Effective Services (offices in both Belfast and Dublin)	Research Branch	2010/11
Attendance as advisory group member of the UNESCO Children and Youth Programme	University College Galway and UU Coleraine. Establishment of an all-Ireland research programme on Children and Youth.	Research Branch	2010/11

Details of Project, Scheme or Initiative	Name of ROI Government Department or Agency or Nongovernmental Organisations	Branch Name	Year
Messines - Maintenance of a war Memorial in Belgium.	Department of Social Welfare	Regeneration Sites Team OFMDFM - Financial provision only.	Ongoing project within OFMDFM for foreseeable future.
Development and Refurbishment of Leuven Institute for Ireland in Europe	Department of Finance, Department of Foreign Affairs and Office of Public Works	European Policy & Co-ordination Unit (EPCU)	Project initiated in 2002 and concluded in 2010

There are currently no planned future departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which we intend to seek co-operation from a Republic of Ireland Government Department or its agency, or a Republic of Ireland nongovernmental organisation.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the costs of Sir Jon Shortridge's investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant. **(AQW 1023/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer to our responses to AQW 3767/11 and AQW 4098/11. The costs of the investigation remain as provided in these answers.

Disciplinary Charges Against a Senior Civil Servant

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the independent board of inquiry that was convened to consider the disciplinary charges against a senior civil servant, to detail (i) the terms of reference; (ii) the members on the panel; and (iii) the cost of the inquiry. **(AQW 1024/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The independent board of inquiry was part of the disciplinary process which has been managed in accordance with the policy and procedures contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook.

The terms of reference of the board of inquiry were set out in a letter from the Head of the NI Civil Service to each board of inquiry member as follows:

Sir John Shortridge has completed his investigation and following his report to me I have written setting out specific disciplinary charges and inviting Paul Priestly to reply in writing. The role of the board of inquiry, which will consist of 3 members, is to consider the facts of the case, taking account of the investigation report, any written response to the disciplinary charges, other relevant documentation and representations made at hearing as appropriate and submit a report to the Head of the NICS which will set out the opinion of the board of enquiry as to whether the offence has been committed and a recommendation on what, if any, disciplinary penalties should be imposed in accordance with NICS disciplinary policy. In conducting its proceedings the board will invite Paul Priestly to attend a hearing to answer the specific allegations of misconduct and to put forward any additional facts or information that he wishes to be taken into account.

On receipt of the board's report it will be for me to decide whether disciplinary action is appropriate. Should disciplinary action be taken then the officer has the right of appeal. All these procedures are in accordance with the NICS Staff Handbook.

The board of inquiry was comprised of Margaret Elliott CBE, Sir Patrick Haren and Sir John Semple.

The cost of the board of inquiry was £12,672.

Disciplinary Charges Against a Senior Civil Servant

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who carried out the review in relation to a senior civil servant's appeal against the findings of the independent board of inquiry that was convened to consider the disciplinary charges against him,
(AQW 1025/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Head of the NI Civil Service has advised us that the disciplinary process has been managed in accordance with the policy and procedures contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook.

The appeal was considered by an independent person, Sir Peter Housden, with no prior involvement in the case.

Social Investment Fund and the Social Protection Fund

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made with the Social Investment Fund and the Social Protection Fund.
(AQW 1031/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials are currently engaged in discussions both with officials from other government departments and key stakeholders to develop a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund.

It is hoped to issue this paper for a period of public consultation in the next few weeks.

In addition to the Social Investment Fund, the Executive proposes a Social Protection Fund that will assist those most in need within the wider community. The Social Protection Fund will target individuals and families facing hardship due to the current economic downturn.

This Fund will operate as an Executive Fund therefore we will be working with other departments to identify the most appropriate and effective means of targeting interventions at appropriate families and individuals.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when they will publish Sir Jon Shortridge's report on his investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant in the Department for Regional Development; (ii) why it took from November 2010 until now to take action against the senior civil servant; and (iii) whether the civil servant has had his salary reduced to Grade 3 level.
(AQW 1049/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer to our response to AQW 889/11-15 on the Sir Jon Shortridge report. The process was managed strictly in accordance with the disciplinary policy and procedures contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook. The stages involved in this process have taken since November 2010 to complete.

The civil servant has been downgraded from his current civil service grade of Permanent Secretary (Grade 2) to Deputy Secretary (Grade 3). His salary has been reduced to Grade 3 level.

Social Investment Fund

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the criteria that will be applied to applications for funding under the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 1080/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials are currently engaged in discussions both with officials from other government departments and key stakeholders to develop a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund. This paper will consider a range of issues including proposed application arrangements.

It is hoped to issue the paper for public consultation in the next few weeks.

Air Passenger Duty

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Executive did not respond to the Treasury's consultation on Air Passenger Duty.

(AQW 1096/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As the department with the policy lead on Air Passenger Duty, the Department of Finance and Personnel responded to the consultation, having sought the views of Executive members. We also raised the issue with both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer at our recent meetings with them.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Executive did not respond to the Treasury's consultation on Air Passenger Duty.

(AQW 1103/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As the department with the policy lead on Air Passenger Duty, the Department of Finance and Personnel responded to the consultation, having sought the views of Executive members. We also raised the issue with both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer at our recent meetings with them.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish Sir Jon Shortridge's report on his investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant in the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 1167/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The investigation commissioned by the Head of the NI Civil Service and carried out by Sir Jon Shortridge was part of an internal Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) management process as part of its disciplinary policy.

In accordance with the disciplinary policies and procedures contained in the NICS Human Resources Handbook and the obligations placed on employers by data protection legislation, the contents of Sir Jon's report will not be published. This was set out in letters sent by the Head of the NI Civil Service to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Chair of the Regional Development Committee.

Department of Justice

Mr McNarry asked First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with their Executive colleagues regarding the need for either a resolution of the Assembly or a second Act, as set out in the Northern Ireland Act 2009, to ensure that the Department of Justice is not dissolved on 1 May 2012.

(AQW 1175/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are aware of the provisions of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009. We will consult with Executive colleagues on these matters as, and when, necessary.

Department of Justice

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps their Department has taken to ensure that any second Act of the Assembly would complete the legislative process in time to ensure that the Department of Justice would not dissolve on 1 May 2012.

(AQW 1176/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are aware of the provisions contained in paragraph 8 of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009 and the timescales applying. We have been considering the matter with our officials.

Minister of Justice

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have sought legal advice in relation to the consequences for the Executive should a second Act of the Assembly repeal the initial provision for a Minister of Justice provided for in the Northern Ireland Act 2009.

(AQW 1178/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are aware of the provisions of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009. We have access to a wide range of professional legal advice, including specialist expertise on constitutional law.

Suspension of a Senior Civil Servant

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether disciplinary action was taken against any other staff in relation to Sir Jon Shortridge's report on his investigation into the events which led to the suspension of a senior civil servant in the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 1184/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No disciplinary action was taken against any other NICS staff in relation to Sir Jon Shortridge's report.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescale for the implementation of the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 1199/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials are currently engaged in discussions both with officials from other government departments and key stakeholders to develop a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund.

It is hoped to issue this paper for a period of public consultation over the summer.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the geographical breakdown of the areas which will benefit from the Social Investment Fund will be completed.

(AQW 1200/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As advised in our answer to AQW1199/11-15 our officials are currently developing a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund.

We have identified 8 possible Social Investment Zones in the pre-consultation paper although we are still considering which approach will best address the priority needs of the most disadvantaged

communities within these. The identification of needs and how resources will be targeted on specific geographic areas will be important issues in the consultation exercise.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to procurement by their Department, (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.
(AQW 1238/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to previous responses to AQW 477/11-15 and AQW 878/11-15.

Maze/Long Kesh: Economy

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of how the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site will contribute to the economy.
(AQO 187/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In establishing the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, a body working at arm's length from government and with statutory objectives and powers, we want to send the message that we are committed to unlocking and realising the full economic potential of this former security site.

Maze/Long Kesh will be regenerated in phases. Subject to statutory processes and value for money appraisal, the first phase could see the relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to the site in the next few years and the construction of a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre on the site by 2015.

Initially the construction industry will benefit, but the initiatives outlined above would help attract significant private sector investment with the firm intention that the outcomes will help revive our economy, provide significant job creation, reduce deprivation, and develop prosperity and social regeneration here and further afield.

Commissioner for Older People

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the position on the appointment of a Commissioner for Older People.
(AQO 191/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The recruitment process to select a Commissioner for Older People is ongoing. It is our hope that we will announce the successful applicant shortly and we expect the person appointed to take up post by September 2011.

Business in the Community

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of Business in the Community and whether it could be better equipped to inspire young people to achieve more ambitious goals.
(AQO 185/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Whilst we engage with Business in the Community in areas of common interest, it does not receive public funding, and stands independently from government as a not-for-profit membership organisation. We have therefore undertaken no formal review of either the organisation's capacity or its ability to inspire our young people.

OFMDFM Junior Ministers intend to meet with Business in the Community later this month to explore ways in which our organisations can work together on a range of issues – issues such as raising the aspirations of young people in deprived areas.

The Junior Ministers will explore with Business in the Community opportunities to engage businesses in addressing some of the needs in tackling disadvantage and unemployment. They will also want to hear ideas from the organisation on where they see the business community – working in partnership with government – getting involved in addressing the priority of the Executive in the future.

Corporation Tax

Mr Hamilton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their discussions with HM Treasury in relation to the devolution of Corporation Tax powers.

(AQO 189/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We, along with Minister Foster and Minister Wilson, met with David Gauke, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, and Secretary of State Owen Paterson, at the start of this year to give them our thoughts on rebalancing our economy. Following our discussions, HM Treasury published its consultation document “Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy” on 24 March 2011. As part of the consultation, we attended a consultation event in London on 8 June to discuss with key representatives of UK business the impact of reducing the Corporation Tax rate. Minister Wilson, Minister Foster, the Secretary of State and Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury were also in attendance. This was a positive meeting with the general view that this would increase the attractiveness of the local economy as a location for investment. Another event is planned for Belfast on 7 July.

The consultation period for this report runs to 1 July 2011. The paper considers the impact of lowering the Corporation Tax rate here but also includes consideration of other fiscal measures for example, extension of the National Insurance holiday, enhanced R&D tax credits, increased capital allowances. The HMT report in particular considers the impact of investment locally of lowering the rate.

Ethnic Minority Communities

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the support that is currently available to the bodies that represent ethnic minority communities.

(AQO 190/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As part of our work to build a cohesive, shared and integrated society, we recognise and value the vital role played by those groups on the ground that provide help and advice to minority ethnic people and migrant workers.

The OFMDFM Minority Ethnic Development Fund provides vital support not simply for bodies that represent these communities but for bodies that provide aid and support to minority ethnic communities. Funding of £1,142,060.60 was agreed for financial year 2011-2012 and all successful applicants will shortly be informed of their allocation.

This funding will enable these groups to build up capacity and provide the practical support and advice which is needed within our communities.

In conjunction with the fund, OFMDFM officials provide advice and support to organisations working in the sector. The Department also supports the work of both the Racial Equality Forum and Racial Equality Panel facilitating a partnership approach together with the exchange of information and best practice.

Maze/Long Kesh: Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the Peace III funding application that was submitted for the development of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution facility at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

(AQO 192/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 14 January 2011, MLK Programme Delivery Unit submitted a £18.2m (£20m Euro) Peace III funding application to help develop a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

The Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre will be an international centre of excellence dedicated to peace building and the transformation of societies. The Centre will have 4 key functions:

- International Exchange;
- Education, Research, Teaching and Learning;
- Exhibition Space and Archive; and
- Shared Location and Facilities.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Forest Service NI

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the benefits of allowing private companies and land owners to manage land owned by Forest Service NI.

(AQW 769/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department is committed to the efficient management of the forest estate and our strategic objective to obtain better value from the Forest Estate through wider use of our assets. Forest Service is currently engaged in a Commercialisation programme and this has identified renewable energy and leisure as two sectors which are to be taken forward to market. The benefits to be gained from allowing the private sector to manage ventures / facilities in our forests will not only result in significant returns from windfarm development but private investment in leisure project types, eg caravan and camping, will result in enhanced provision of the existing leisure facilities and services and improved all-round visitor experience.

Forest Service NI

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether Forest Service NI raises revenue from publicly owned forests; (ii) if so, what mechanisms are used to raise the money; (iii) how much revenue has been raised in each of the last five years; and (iv) if Forest Service NI does not raise revenue from publicly owned forests does it intend to do so.

(AQW 772/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service generates revenue from its lands and assets through a number of different means such as timber production, commercial recreational income, rental income and charges for use of facilities and licences for planned activities.

**THE AMOUNTS RAISED FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS ARE DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW
(ACCOUNTS FIGURES FOR 2010/11 HAVE NOT YET BEEN APPROVED).**

Income stream / Financial year	2005/06 £'000	2006/07 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000
Timber ¹	5,479	5,928	6,803	7,606	7,243
Other Forest Products ²	68	70	74	4	110
Recreation Income, split:					
Commercial Recreation ³	381	393	432	416	453
Non-commercial Recreation ⁴	339	371	388	324	376
Rentals	-	-	-	315	278
Other Activities ⁵	436	545	604	89	225
Total Annual Revenue	6,703	7,307	8,301	8,754	8,685

Notes:

- 1 Timber income is generated through harvesting, production, felling and sale of timber throughout various forest sites.
- 2 Other Forest Products income relates to Firewood, Foliage, Christmas tree and Game income.
- 3 Commercial Recreation relates to Recreation Income from caravan and camping.
- 4 Non-Commercial Recreation relates to income generated from entrance charges to forests.
- 5 Income from Other Activities relates to other non-trading income. Note that the financial years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 Rental Income was classified within Other Activities.

In addition to the above we have a strategic objective to obtain better value from the forest estate through wider commercial use of our assets.

Forest Service is currently engaged in a commercialisation programme and this has identified renewable energy and leisure as the two sectors which are to be taken forward to market. Indicators are that there are potentially significant returns from wind farm development on our estate. In line with our Business Plan 2011/12 target we plan to go to market later in this business year.

Properties Entrance Fees

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many properties under her Department's control charge an entrance fee; and how much each of these properties has raised in revenue in each of the last three years.

(AQW 783/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are 10 properties under my Department's control for which fees are charged. However, in the case of 9 of these properties, which relate to forests, the fee represents charges for the use of recreational facilities, including car parking, at forest parks.

In addition, there are fees and income generated at the Forest Service headquarters for a range of services and these are outlined in the footnote to the table below.

The following table summarises the revenue raised at each of the properties, including the Forest Service headquarters. It should be noted that information relating to Forest Service could not be provided for the financial year 2010/11 as their accounts have not yet been finalised. In this regard I have provided information for the preceding 3 financial years for which figures are available.

Property	Financial Year			
	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Greenmount Campus	Not Applicable	Nil	Nil	7
Tollymore Forest	223	247	264	Not available
Castlewellan Forest	274	201	250	Not available
Glenariff Forest	60	56	59	Not available
Gosford Forest	135	120	131	Not available
Drum Manor Forest	36	35	29	Not available
Gortin Glen Forest	3	3	3	Not available
Ballypatrick Forest	2	3	3	Not available
Portglenone Forest	10	10	12	Not available
Florencecourt Forest	9	4	7	Not available
Forest Service HQ*	68	61	71	Not available

* Forest Service HQ income relates to recreational income generated on an ad-hoc basis for the accommodation of special events such as motoring, shooting and group recreational activity across the estate. Additionally, Forest Service HQ generate income from Forestry land through direct sale of caravan and camping (Touring in the Trees) and car permits whereby the recipient has opted to cover their car parking fees on an annual basis which allows unlimited parking in the specific Forest Parks that are covered under the permit conditions.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the long-term damage to wildlife habitat on farms as a result of the need to meet the area based system requirements of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 784/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All area aid schemes are subject to strict EU land eligibility requirements. To ensure compliance with these, it is essential that farmers claim only on eligible land. In doing so, however, great care is taken to protect wildlife habitat.

Indeed, land within a business, irrespective of whether it is used to claim SFP entitlements or claim payment under another aid scheme, must be maintained in accordance with the Cross-Compliance Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and must be kept in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC). GAEC measures cover the protection of habitats (Wildlife Areas), Archaeological Sites and Permanent Pasture.

If land is currently ineligible because of, for example, scrub encroachment or the state of heather, then farmers, provided they do not breach their cross-compliance obligations, can restore its condition to meet the eligibility conditions for the scheme.

I can reassure you that my Department is committed to ensuring the GAEC measures on the protection of habitats are strictly adhered to, to minimise any impact on wildlife habitat and any possible breaches will be thoroughly investigated.

If farmers need more help on these issues, I would encourage them to contact the Single Farm Payment Land Eligibility helpline on 0845 30 44 508.

Ministerial Drivers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to detail the arrangements relating to the recruitment, status and payment of her ministerial driver; (ii) whether the arrangements differ from those that were in place prior to 1 April 2011; and (iii) if so, how the arrangements differ.
(AQW 826/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In January 2011 the Executive agreed to transfer arrangements for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers along with associated budgets to the relevant departments. Prior to this DFP was responsible for providing ministerial transport to my predecessor.

My Department has no involvement in the recruitment or other employment arrangements for my driver as he is not a civil service employee.

Single Farm Payment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Single Farm Payment is classed as income and is subject to means testing when applications are being considered for grants.

(AQW 888/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Council Regulation 73/2009 which lays down the implementing rules for the Single Farm Payment describes the payment as direct income support and therefore it is correct to class the Single Farm Payment as income.

There are no grant schemes currently operated by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development that takes the Single Farm Payment into consideration as part of a means testing process.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which she intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 900/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Small Farm Owners

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to encourage and assist small farm owners to install anaerobic digestion plants to supply their farm with heat and electricity.

(AQW 916/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The DARD Renewable Energy Action Plan was published in June 2010. The Action Plan outlines the activities that DARD has committed to carry out with a view to creating an environment that will enable the agricultural and forestry sectors to exploit the opportunities associated with renewable energy.

The implementation of the actions within the Action Plan are currently underway and are aimed at encouraging all farm owners to take informed decisions on the most appropriate renewable energy technologies to suit their business needs.

These activities include:

- The Research Programme on AD conducted at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institutes (AFBI), at Hillsborough.

- Supply chain development activities through the Supply Chain Development Programme.
- A programme of training and awareness through the College of Agriculture, Food and Enterprise (CAFRE) focusing on AD.
- The establishment of an AD Portal providing a range of information online.
- The availability of demonstration opportunities at the AD installation at the Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence, at AFBI, Hillsborough.
- The launch of the Biomass Processing Challenge Fund in June 2010 to support the generation of renewable energy primarily for on farm use. Under this fund letters of offer have issued to support 5 on farm AD projects.
- AD technologies and associated information will also form an important element of the Agricultural Renewable Energy Event to be held by CAFRE, Greenmount Campus, later in the year.

My Department has recently established a small External Stakeholder Group to undertake a review of the first year of the implementation of the Action Plan to provide advice on future direction and will report before the end of summer 2012.

Welfare of Animals Act

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether she will enact the provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act through subordinate legislation to stop wild animals being used in circuses; (ii) how such regulations could be enforced; and (iii) what plans her Department has to allow officials to inspect circuses without a police presence.

(AQW 924/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 provides a range of new powers to regulate any activity involving vertebrate animals. My priorities on animal welfare over the coming period will be the roll-out of the Act and the roll-out of the Dogs Amendment Act 2011.

However, I can assure you that in time I do plan to take advice on the legal implications of banning wild animals in circuses and on the options open to me for example, an outright ban or the introduction of a robust regulatory system so that the welfare of wild animals in circuses is fully protected. Before making any decision I would also want to examine developments in the south of Ireland, Britain and Europe and also to engage with stakeholders, including circus operators, and their representatives, to ensure that their views are properly considered.

The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 contains powers for inspectors to enforce any regulations made under it. Under the Act where there is reason to believe an animal is suffering or likely to suffer an inspector can, without a police presence, take immediate action to alleviate the suffering of an animal.

Commission Regulation EC 1739/2005, which lays down the animal health requirements for the movement of circus animals between Member States, requires circuses to be registered in the Member State where they are resident before moving to another Member State. While we have no circuses based in the north of Ireland, there are a number of circuses registered in the south, some of which regularly travel here. My Department has an agreed protocol with the Department of Agriculture, Marine and Food which provides for an inspection of animals from these registered circuses before moving back to the south. My Department has powers to inspect circus animals under this Regulation without a police presence.

Quota for Nephrops

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she intends to have with her counterparts in Westminster and the European Commission in relation to increasing the quota for nephrops at the annual negotiations in Brussels in December 2011.

(AQW 954/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will be attending the Agri-Fish Council in Brussels on 19th July and I will be meeting then the Scottish Minister, Richard Lochhead and Defra Minister, Richard Benyon and I will be raising the topic of Nephrops with them. I will also be meeting with Simon Coveney TD, on the 12 July to discuss a range of issues including the December Council. I hope to have other meetings with the European Commission during the Agri-Fish Council in Brussels. There will be further meetings between Ministers about negotiating priorities for fishing opportunities for 2012 following publication of the Commission's proposals in September.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 963/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested has been set out in the table below. However, detailed information on salary and pension contributions costs cannot be disclosed as this is personal information and is protected under the Data Protection Act 1998.

(i) Salary Costs

To provide detailed salary information would risk disclosure of personal information under the Data Protection Act. Therefore salary is only being disclosed by pay band.

Salary Date	Salary Range
From May 2007	£56,100 to £78,540
From April 2008	£56,100 to £78,540
From April 2009	£57,300 to £82,531
From April 2010	£57,300 to £82,531
From April 2011	£57,300 to £82,531

(ii) Pension contributions

To provide detailed information on pension contributions would risk disclosure under the Data Protection Act as scheme membership is personal information. The Department can confirm that contributions for the Premium and Nuvos Schemes are between 18% and 25%. Contributions within the Special Adviser Pay Band were 21.5% from 2007 to 2010 and this increased to 23.5% in April 2011.

(iii) Office Costs

There were no incremental office costs as a result of the Special Adviser using existing NICS DFP provided accommodation.

(iv) Expenses

The total amount paid in expenses since May 2007 is £10,959.97

(v) Other Costs

The total spend on IT and mobile phone equipment (including rental) is £13,774.

Rathfriland: Regeneration Strategy

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on a regeneration strategy for Rathfriland.

(AQW 1014/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD does not have a specific budget for regeneration schemes, these are the responsibility of the Department of Social Development. The current work on village renewal, which is being taken forward by my Department through the Rural Development Programme (RDP), is within the broader context of assessing the need for funding within rural villages, which will impact on communities, not just environmentally but also socially and economically. The RDP funding is about assisting rural villages to become places that are attractive to live and work in, and where tourists want to visit.

The RDP, as you will be aware, is being delivered on behalf of my Department by Council clusters who have formed into Joint Council Committees and Local Action Groups.

The Joint Council Committee that covers the Rathfriland area is the Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP). Banbridge District Council has applied to DRAP under Axis 3 of the RDP for funding for a Rathfriland Scheme.

I am advised that DRAP are currently working with Banbridge District Council to progress this application. Outstanding issues include the need to produce a planning application and an up to date village plan for Rathfriland. On receipt of these DRAP will commence the appraisal process. Only projects identified in an up to date village plan can be considered for funding.

Designated Cycle Routes in Forests

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to introduce designated cycle routes in forests.

(AQW 1015/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Designated cycle routes are already available in a number of the Department's forests across the north of Ireland covering a distance of around 35 kilometres. These trails provide a variety of challenges depending on an individual's physical abilities and range in nature from family cycling to mountain bike trails.

There are also 32 kilometres of Sustrans routes available on Forest Service land located throughout a number of our forests, including Florencecourt, Muckamore, Binevenagh, Downhill, and Garvagh forests. These are part of a wider national network of cycle trails.

Forest Service has also facilitated various bike events with individual trails identified and designated for the period of the event.

My Department launched a Recreation and Social Use strategy for forests in July 2009. This strategy sets out how we propose to promote the recreational and social use of forests in the north of Ireland, including cycling. I am personally very keen that this strategy should help realise the full potential of our forests.

This strategy acknowledges that Forest Service, on its own, will have neither the resource nor expertise to fully develop the opportunities that exist. For this reason, we will have to work in partnership with a range of other providers, and my officials in Forest Service are continuing to explore partnership opportunities with a number of stakeholders including NI Tourist Board, Countryside and Activities Network, National Trust and District Councils.

This strategy is now bearing fruit with the recent launch of a trails project at Castle Ward in County Down. This is a great example of the strategy in action. My officials in Forest Service have been working closely with the National Trust for the last two years on this £750,000 development. A significant section of the trails are located on Forest Service land and our commitment to partnership working has been essential to the successful completion of the project. The multi-purpose trail

network covers a distance of 34 kms and includes cycling, pony trekking and walking routes, as well as elements of the trails which are all access.

A major mountain bike project for the Mournes is also being progressed with Down DC and Newry and Mourne DC with 40 kms of trails being proposed in Castlewellan Forest Park and Rostrevor forest at an approximate cost of £1.5 million. If the project proceeds, it will be a further significant development of cycling opportunities in our forests.

Cycle Tourism Projects in Forests

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to develop cycle tourism projects in forests, similar to the 7stanes project in Scotland which has generated significant income.

(AQW 1016/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service manages 75,000 hectares of forest land in the north of Ireland. As outlined in the strategy document "NI Forestry – A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth (2006)", we are committed to managing these forests in a sustainable way and, as a result, provide a balance of social, environmental and economic benefits. This recognises that forest areas play an essential role in meeting their core objectives of delivering commercial, environmental and social benefits to the people in the north of Ireland and particularly to local communities.

We believe that our forests already deliver significant recreational and social benefits and that the potential exists for further development, particularly through working with other recreational and tourism providers.

In promoting the further development of recreation and tourism benefits, Forest Service wish to work with Local Authorities and other recreational providers to ensure that opportunities are realised, where they can be incorporated within broader Forest Management Plans and objectives.

An example of this strategy in action is the recently launched 34 km trails project in Castle Ward, where National Trust is the operating partner. Significant effort has also been invested in close co-operation with a range of partners including NITB, Sport NI, CAAN as well as Down and Newry and Mourne district councils in the development of a 40km mountain bike trails project in the Mournes, with the proposed location being Castlewellan Forest Park and Rostrevor forest and an approximate cost of £1.5 million. If this project proceeds, it will add greatly to recreation in the two forest sites, and will offer significant tourism potential, as a mountain biking destination.

Additionally, to assess the existing and potential tourism development opportunities available from forests in the north of Ireland, a Tourism Study has been jointly commissioned between the NI Tourist Board and Forest Service. The purpose of the study is to gather and analyse tourism information and provide evidence-based proposals for tourism development in our forests. This will inform the Forest Service planning review process and assist the NI Tourist Board and other partners to support the case for tourism development in forests.

The study will improve the quality of information available to forest managers in developing forest plans, the tourism sector and potential recreation and tourism operating partners, by demonstrating the benefits of forests and identifying opportunities to realise the tourism potential through forest plans that will enhance the visitor experience and maximise economic benefits.

Rural Development Programme and Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) how many farmers applied to (a) the Rural Development Programme; and (b) the Farm Modernisation Programme; and (ii) how many farmers have had their business benchmarked.

(AQW 1020/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Details on the number of applications received from farmers under the Rural Development Programme and the Farm Modernisation Programme are set out in the table below, along with the

number of farm businesses benchmarked. Information on the number of farmers who have applied to the Programme is not available as individual farmers may have submitted multiple applications to different Measures.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Q. i (a)	29,715	23,133	27,795
Q. i (b)	9,271	Nil	7,940
Q. ii	673	764	927

Rural Community Networks

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she will take to ensure the future of rural community networks, including the continued provision of funding over the next four financial years.

(AQW 1042/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently provides around £1.2 million a year in support of community development in rural areas, supporting the Rural Community Network, the NI Rural Women's Network and 9 Rural Support Networks.

I am currently considering how my Department, working with others, can most effectively support the sustainability of our rural communities and what local and regional community development structures will be needed to do so.

I am keen to see more integrated community development structures at the local and regional level which have a strong rural component and which best support those on the ground in our rural communities.

Gorse Fires

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the damage caused to the countryside by the recent deliberately started gorse fires.

(AQW 1046/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is currently finalising work on surveying the extent of Forest Service woodland recently damaged by fire. It is imperative that action is taken to assess the damage caused by the fires which will inform further decisions on restoration of the affected areas.

In addition, DARD inspectors will identify the extent of areas damaged by the fires during the course of land-based inspections in 2011. These inspections verify that farmers have met the eligibility and Cross-Compliance requirements for Single Farm Payment and aid schemes for which they have applied.

It is possible that, as result of the fires, some land that was previously eligible for these area-based schemes may now be ineligible or that land may not now meet with the requirements for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). To date my Department has received 240 requests from farmers to set normal scheme rules aside under force majeure because the fires have affected their land in this way. My Department will carefully consider the impact of fire damage in relation to land eligibility for those affected.

Investigation into the causes of recent gorse fires is a matter for the NI Fire and Rescue Service and Police Service of NI and it is not for DARD to speculate whether or not they were started deliberately.

Import Controls

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the import controls will be lifted on cattle and sheep from the rest of the UK which were imposed to restrict the spread of Blue Tongue. (AQW 1072/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Currently, susceptible animals moving from the Bluetongue Lower Risk Area in Britain to here are required to meet the conditions of Council Regulation 1266/2007 with regard to vaccination.

You will be aware that on 13 June Defra announced that with effect from 5 July 2011 Britain would become a Bluetongue Free Area and the Bluetongue Lower Risk Area would be lifted. This means that from 5 July 2011 trade in susceptible animals to the north from Britain can resume without the need to meet the requirements of Regulation 1266/2007.

Movement of susceptible animals to the north from bluetongue restricted zones in Europe will still be required to meet the conditions of Council Regulation 1266/2007.

I want to build on the good work done and continue the determination in keeping Bluetongue out of the local industry. In order to maintain our Bluetongue freedom here, my Department will continue with risk-based mitigation measures consisting of post import testing and the restriction of imported animals, such as those which have originated from continental Europe, pending the test results.

My Department has advised key stakeholder groups of the change at meetings and via email communications. The Department's website has been updated and further updates will be made. Any farmer intending to import animals from Britain after it becomes a free area will also be advised of the new requirements on applying for an import licence.

Cattle Scab

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures are in place to guard against and monitor Cattle Scab. (AQW 1073/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Psoroptic Mange or 'Cattle Scab' is a severe and debilitating skin disease of cattle caused by an infestation of mites. The disease has never been detected here. The disease is not notifiable nor does my Department have any legal powers in relation to this disease

Since 2007 there have been a number of cases in Britain linked to imports of Belgian Cattle. Cases had been previously reported in continental Europe and the USA but prior to these outbreaks psoroptic mange had not been detected in Britain since the 1980s.

As a result of the increasing risk from outbreaks in Britain in 2009 my Department wrote to importers and breed societies advising them to consider the risks to the industry here of importing potentially infected animals, and also advising them of the clinical signs of the disease and advice on diagnosis and treatment. My Department also issued a Press Release providing similar advice. Information is also available on the DARD website.

Farmers suspecting that their cattle have psoroptic mange should consult their veterinary surgeon as treatment is not straightforward. Failure to kill the mites will lead to a prolonged and more serious disease outbreak and increase the risk of spread to other animals on the farm or other herds.

My Department's Veterinary Service continues to monitor the risks of disease coming here and in the event of an increased risk my Department will issue advice to importers and breed societies.

Milk Production

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's strategy for milk production over the next ten years. (AQW 1081/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The dairy industry makes a very important contribution to the agri-food sector in the north of Ireland. My Department's overall aim for the next ten years will therefore be to help the dairy industry improve its performance in the market place. It is vital that it remains competitive and continues to bring benefit to the local economy, particularly in rural areas.

For many years activity in the dairy sector (including the level of milk production in each Member state) has been subject to various EU restraints and support mechanisms. These have in large measure had a significant impact on the development of the industry. However, important changes have already taken place and others lie ahead.

Prior to the 2003 CAP Reform, relatively high intervention prices and other EU support mechanisms meant that an increase in milk quota would normally have been followed by an increase in production, but as a result of the 2003 reforms the intervention mechanism now operates as a safety net. This means that production levels are now more likely to be determined by market conditions than by EU decisions. In view of this my Department's strategy will be to support the industry as it seeks to achieve higher added value and introduce additional innovative products that meet modern day consumer requirements.

As regards future levels of milk production I believe that a market-led strategy is vital for the dairy industry. In practice this means, especially when milk quotas end in 2015, that decisions on milk production should be taken by milk producers in the context of their input costs and market returns (i.e. the milk price achievable). Therefore, to help ensure that the industry remains sustainable, my Department through CAFRE and AFBI remain available to provide education, training, technical support and research to help improve efficiency and competitiveness. In particular good animal husbandry and grassland management skills will continue to be the solid foundation of any dairy farm and these must be continually updated to take account of best practice, new technologies and other developments.

As our producers consider future production levels I can confirm that they are in a very different position to those in the south. Since the deregulation of milk marketing arrangements in Britain and here in 1995 they have been free to purchase milk quota from producers in Britain (and they have done so, with quota rising from 1.29 billion litres to 1.85 billion litres) whereas producers in the south have been constrained by their Member State limit. So much restructuring on farms in the north has already taken place and this puts them in a good position to face future challenges.

My Department will continue to help the industry to improve its competitiveness over the next ten years. We need genuine efficiencies and added value which is sustainable. Research, innovation, increase in skills and economies of scale all have a role to play. We will work together with the industry for an outcome which is in the best long term interests of the sector and local economy.

Next Generation Broadband Fund

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money her Department contributed to the Next Generation Broadband Fund.

(AQW 1264/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department DARD has invested £2.5 million in the 'Next Generation Broadband' programme delivered on the ground by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This funding was specifically targeted at rural areas that did not have broadband or were running at lower speeds and I am confident this will have a very positive impact on rural dwellers. I have said publically that access to broadband for rural dwellers is one of my priorities, and I have asked officials to examine ways in which we can work to extend broadband coverage in liaison with the relevant Departments and providers.

Forestry By-Laws

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain the rationale behind the proposed changes to forestry bye-laws which will prohibit the public use of forests between sunset and sunrise, given that forests are used during this time by groups such as mountain bike enthusiasts.
(AQW 1390/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service has proposed daylight access hours to help it deal with antisocial activity and to meet its duty of care obligation to protect forest visitors, which you will appreciate, is more difficult during the hours of darkness. Nevertheless, we do not wish to restrict legitimate night-time access and activities, and indeed the Byelaws give scope for this, with written permission, which, among other things, alerts us to the presence at night of visitors, and facilitates the giving of any necessary guidance or precautions. Indeed, night-time closing times are a widespread feature of byelaws for urban and country parks.

Nevertheless, I am aware of the strength of feeling around this proposed byelaw, with the recent ending of the consultation period, and I will consider carefully the range of views. If it is possible to address these concerns in a balanced and reasonable way, I will certainly do so.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ministerial Drivers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to detail the arrangements relating to the recruitment, status and payment of her ministerial driver; (ii) whether the arrangements differ from those that were in place prior to 1 April 2011; and (iii) if so, how the arrangements differ.
(AQW 825/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): In January 2011 the Executive agreed to transfer arrangements for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers along with associated budgets to the relevant departments. Prior to this DFP was responsible for providing ministerial transport to my predecessor.

My Department has no involvement in the recruitment or other employment arrangements for my driver as he is not a civil service employee.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which she intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 906/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department together with the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht jointly sponsors the North South Language Body (Foras na Gaeilge and Ulster-Scots Agency) and Waterways Ireland.

A table detailing the other schemes, projects and initiatives that my Department, and its associated Arms Length Bodies, receive (and are receiving) co-operation from Government Departments, agencies and non-governmental organisations in the South of Ireland is attached at Annex 1.

Department's Priorities for 2011-15

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's priorities for 2011-15.

(AQW 932/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At present the priorities for my Department, which will contribute to the Economy, Social Inclusion and Equality, Health, Education and the Environment, are as follows;

- To progress the Regional Stadium Developments;
- To maximise the benefits from 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games;
- To successfully deliver the World Police and Fire Games 2013;
- To bring forward legislation to protect the Irish Language and strategies to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language; and to develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture;
- To develop the Creative Industries;
- To increase north/south cooperation to develop innovative and efficient public services;
- To promote the positive impact that participation in culture, arts and leisure activities has on both physical and mental health, including suicide prevention;
- To continue to promote social interventions including Community Based Arts and Community Festivals;
- To promote the STEM agenda and the DCAL family's contribution to education and lifelong learning;
- To secure resource from the Executive to ensure PRONI provides the significant support required to the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry;
- To maintain effective governance and take forward the review of DCAL's Arms Length Bodies to examine if their current structure is the most efficient and effective; and
- To manage Salmon and Inland Fisheries to provide for long term sustainability.

Library Members

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many members there are in each library; and how many members each had in each of the last three years.

(AQW 960/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following table details how many active members* each library had in each of the last three years.

LIBRARIES NI - ACTIVE MEMBERS SUMMARY 2008 - 2011

Library Location	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Andersonstown Library	1,261	1,122	Closed
Antrim Library	2,166	3,567	4,098
Ardoyne Library	1,174	1,222	1,628
Armagh Library	5,266	5,768	4,882
Ballycastle Library	1,984	2,010	1,748
Ballyclare Library	2,792	2,832	2,759
Ballyhackamore Library	3,152	2,995	3,178
Ballymacarrett Library	704	594	Closed
Ballymena Central Library	8,081	8,108	7,070
Ballymoney Library	3,747	3,643	3,312

Library Location	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ballynahinch Library	2,442	2,378	1,733
Banbridge Library	4,775	4,907	4,309
Bangor Library	11,191	13,456	9,924
Belfast Central Library	7,830	6,980	9,098
Belvoir Park Library	525	495	Closed
Bessbrook Library	1,335	1,353	1,582
Braniel Library	500	467	Closed
Broughshane Library	951	829	786
Brownlow Library	2,043	2,290	2,088
Carnlough Library	485	460	662
Carrickfergus Library	5,399	5,344	6,766
Carryduff Library	1,325	1,256	1,225
Castlederg Library	1,610	1,670	1,410
Castlewellan Library	1,463	1,466	1,297
Centre for Migration Studies	3	18	11
Chichester Library	2,577	2,357	2,082
Cloughfern Library	1,088	1,012	911
Coalisland Library	2,163	2,368	2,140
Coleraine Library	5,315	5,430	5,209
Colin Glen Library	3,541	3,370	3,247
Comber Library	2,720	2,515	2,292
Cookstown Library	5,596	5,800	6,885
Cregagh Library	1,897	1,987	2,343
Creggan Library	1,342	1,311	1,391
Crossmaglen Library	1,125	1,217	1,112
Crumlin Library	1,540	1,517	1,207
Cushendall Library	872	811	826
Derry Central Library	10,170	10,239	10,589
Donaghadee Library	2,279	2,246	2,227
Downpatrick Library	5,476	5,526	5,008
Draperstown Library	846	888	798
Dromore Library	1,224	1,198	933
Dundonald Library	2,302	2,351	2,047
Dungannon Library	5,800	6,148	11,824

Library Location	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Dungiven Library	1,157	1,136	1,453
Dunmurry Library	658	635	Closed
Enniskillen Library	5,456	5,836	4,681
Falls Road Library	1,932	2,008	3,072
Finaghy Library	2,651	2,756	2,614
Fintona Library	534	596	783
Fivemiletown Library	887	911	891
Garvagh Library	707	685	703
Gilford Library	507	494	582
Gilnahirk Library	584	592	Closed
Glengormley Library	6,407	6,337	5,714
Greenisland Library	1,310	1,338	1,293
Greystone Library	2,235	2,158	1,955
Grove Library	1,644	1,186	2,360
Hollywood Arches Library	3,029	2,936	2,942
Hollywood Library	3,301	3,260	2,606
Irish & Local Studies Library	30	39	28
Irvinestown Library	1,522	1,562	1,158
Keady Library	1,395	1,313	1,424
Kells & Connor Library	670	546	582
Kilkeel Library	2,575	2,680	2,121
Killyleagh Library	1,235	1,211	969
Kilrea Library	821	821	697
Larne Library	4,140	4,319	4,058
Ligoniel Library	617	619	Closed
Limavady Library	3,793	4,060	5,563
Lisburn Library	12,359	12,182	10,981
Lisburn Road Library	3,074	2,950	2,803
Lisnaskea Library	1,847	1,946	1,543
Lurgan Library	6,309	6,398	6,219
Maghera Library	2,178	2,121	1,994
Magherafelt Library	4,476	4,688	5,177
Moirra Library	1,543	1,432	1,298
Moneymore Library	554	546	642

Library Location	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Moy Library	631	578	573
Newcastle Library	3,590	3,609	3,187
Newry Library	7,281	7,579	5,714
Newtownards Library	4,463	4,174	3,452
Newtownbreda Library	2,995	2,933	3,327
Newtownstewart Library	432	649	559
Oldpark Road Library	188	145	Closed
Omagh Library	9,815	10,500	9,801
Ormeau Road Library	3,863	3,822	3,451
Portadown Library	5,683	5,689	6,624
Portaferry Library	1,263	1,401	1,428
Portglenone Library	891	862	730
Portrush Library	1,483	1,581	1,421
Portstewart Library	1,816	1,858	1,614
Randalstown Library	1,644	1,548	1,308
Rathcoole Library	1,587	1,646	1,828
Rathfriland Library	1,472	1,584	1,619
Richhill Library	970	1,037	917
Saintfield Library	1,595	1,540	1,422
Sandy Row Library	337	278	Closed
Shankill Road Library	1,797	1,929	1,715
Shantallow Library	3,633	3,451	2,835
Strabane Library	4,951	5,593	4,756
Strathfoyle Library	881	999	722
Suffolk Library	1,861	1,851	2,405
Tandragee Library	1,331	1,336	1,475
Tullycarnet Library	1,180	1,209	918
Warrenpoint Library	2,816	3,110	2,790
Waterside Library	4,143	4,428	3,917
Whitehead Library	1,358	1,314	1,531
Whiterock Library	1,263	1,203	882
Whitewell Library	128	93	CLOSED
Woodstock Road Library	2,080	2,101	1,860

* Active Members are defined as members who initially joined a particular library but may then have borrowed items from, or used computers in, any library location during the year in question.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 962/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) From May 2007 until 5th May 2011 Special Advisers employed in DCAL were paid in the following Pay Bands.

1 April 2007 Pay Band B Min £56,100 – Max £78,540

1 April 2008 Pay Band B Min £57,300 – Max £79,740

1 April 2009 Pay Band B Min £57,300 – Max £82,531

There has been no increase in the Pay Bands within which Special Advisers are paid since April 2009.

(ii) To give detailed information on pension contributions paid would risk a disclosure under the Data Protection Act as the scheme/arrangement the member is in is personal information. Special Advisers who choose to join the NICS pension scheme contribute 3.5% of their salary. The employer meets any other costs of the scheme.

(iii) A total of £6,319.39 was paid in expenses to Special Advisers employed in DCAL from May 2007 until 5th May 2011.

(iv) There were no incremental office costs as a result of Special Advisers using existing NICS DFP provided accommodation.

(v) A total of £623.80 other costs was paid to Special Advisers employed in DCAL from May 2007 until 5th May 2011.

Capital Investment Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what capital investment projects her Department has planned for the South Antrim constituency over the next four years.

(AQW 1030/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the next four years from 2011 - 2015 DCAL has no confirmed Capital Investment plans for the South Antrim constituency as of now.

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of visitors to each library in (a) 2009/10; and (b) 2010/11; (ii) the staff hours for each library in (a) 2009/10; and (b) 2010/11; and (iii) the comparison between the number of staff hours assigned to all libraries in these two years and the number of visitors.

(AQW 1038/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has provided the following breakdown of visits and staff hours per library in each year:

Library	Annual Visits 2009-10	Annual Visits 2010-11	Staff hours per week 2009*	Staff hours per week 2010*
Andersonstown	31,300	Closed	92.92	Closed
Antrim	95,264	111,978	110.25	191.50
Ardoyne	68,550	31,600	138.00	135.00

Library	Annual Visits 2009-10	Annual Visits 2010-11	Staff hours per week 2009*	Staff hours per week 2010*
Armagh	105,456	98,200	245.00	250.00
Ballycastle	54,116	51,730	84.00	98.00
Ballyclare	64,199	63,166	138.00	102.00
Ballyhackamore	102,600	89,150	159.00	145.00
Ballymacarrett	28,550	Closed	68.00	Closed
Ballymena Central	166,531	160,737	402.50	460.00
Ballymoney	69,090	60,811	152.00	164.00
Ballynahinch	32,050	37,750	110.00	154.75
Banbridge	98,436	85,250	194.75	203.63
Bangor Carnegie	169,988	163,300	336.50	352.50
Belfast Central	713,400	731,600	1371.75	1277.00
Belvoir Park	7,124	Closed	44.00	Closed
Bessbrook	19,188	22,200	58.50	58.50
Braniel	6,604	Closed	28.00	Closed
Broughshane	17,509	15,869	29.00	31.50
Brownlow	49,764	42,150	125.00	125.50
Carnlough	17,300	16,534	25.50	29.50
Carrickfergus	139,780	57,450	308.50	242.33
Carryduff	19,916	16,450	60.50	62.50
Castlederg	19,005	18,254	58.50	66.00
Castlewellan	20,748	23,750	71.00	71.00
Chichester	153,250	67,900	108.00	108.00
Cloughfern	34,895	35,048	29.00	29.00
Coalisland	39,624	35,300	80.00	79.63
Coleraine	146,465	145,978	289.00	333.00
Colin Glen	40,092	54,100	257.00	185.00
Comber	23,660	26,950	76.00	160.00
Cookstown	147,732	118,400	226.25	226.25
Cregagh	42,328	45,150	148.50	96.00
Creggan	38,780	40,051	130.33	184.50
Crossmaglen	23,660	18,000	54.00	54.00
Crumlin	28,785	26,238	81.00	63.75
Cushendall	16,844	17,718	37.00	37.00

Library	Annual Visits 2009-10	Annual Visits 2010-11	Staff hours per week 2009*	Staff hours per week 2010*
Derry Central	362,045	354,224	532.00	533.50
Donaghadee	47,580	40,450	172.00	146.00
Downpatrick	154,232	120,900	235.00	235.00
Draperstown	19,864	18,700	30.00	30.00
Dromore	32,604	17,350	48.50	33.88
Dundonald	54,080	57,700	96.00	97.00
Dungannon	177,320	196,600	457.00	442.00
Dungiven	10,884	20,329	55.50	55.50
Dunmurry	7,540	Closed	28.00	Closed
Enniskillen	164,164	165,150	295.50	279.75
Falls Road	52,400	59,106	141.00	166.92
Finaghy	130,750	124,700	167.00	167.00
Fintona	12,220	9,750	25.50	43.50
Fivemiletown	15,080	10,000	47.00	67.00
Garvagh	13,900	18,103	20.00	23.00
Gilford	9,800	10,192	45.75	45.75
Gilnahirk	9,360	Closed	30.00	Closed
Glengormley	106,750	104,805	284.00	260.50
Greenisland	42,150	40,095	51.62	68.12
Greystone	56,857	52,606	103.25	103.50
Grove	52,950	74,800	184.50	184.50
Hollywood	98,644	78,200	166.50	166.50
Hollywood Arches	24,200	76,200	178.00	176.00
Irvinestown	33,800	34,900	81.00	110.00
Keady	12,532	23,100	91.25	64.75
Kells & Connor	13,377	17,118	27.00	24.00
Kilkeel	44,460	31,800	112.25	112.25
Killyleagh	16,900	18,750	45.00	45.00
Kilrea	17,284	14,866	27.00	27.00
Larne	103,723	112,227	270.50	270.50
Ligoneil	16,950	Closed	66.00	Closed
Limavady	95,946	99,160	265.00	305.00
Lisburn City	222,419	243,850	405.75	443.00

Library	Annual Visits 2009-10	Annual Visits 2010-11	Staff hours per week 2009*	Staff hours per week 2010*
Lisburn Road	61,450	57,500	144.00	154.00
Lisnaskea	36,816	38,250	72.50	72.50
Lurgan	160,000	135,900	312.50	296.87
Maghera	44,408	48,100	87.00	94.95
Magherafelt	82,784	93,150	201.00	201.00
Moira	19,604	19,100	67.00	67.00
Moneymore	6,760	9,300	34.00	34.00
Moy	4,628	6,250	35.00	30.38
Newcastle	68,640	62,600	153.50	153.50
Newry City	207,012	169,600	430.50	345.00
Newtownards	78,260	69,900	200.00	200.00
Newtownbreda	39,884	37,950	85.00	144.00
Newtownstewart	8,955	8,116	48.75	54.00
Oldpark	700	Closed	31.00	Closed
Omagh	185,432	172,100	397.25	357.75
Ormeau	96,950	91,900	167.00	167.00
Portadown	113,526	104,600	228.00	248.50
Portaferry	24,076	17,800	69.00	69.00
Portglenone	13,363	13,247	26.00	29.00
Portrush	46,268	48,224	96.00	96.00
Portstewart	53,418	51,678	58.00	58.00
Randalstown	35,931	35,638	54.00	61.00
Rathcoole	47,100	54,273	148.50	112.50
Rathfriland	18,720	23,350	50.34	50.34
Richhill	14,404	10,350	57.38	40.38
Saintfield	30,004	24,950	39.00	66.25
Sandy Row	3,300	Closed	3.00	Closed
Shankill	25,950	31,600	124.00	150.00
Shantallow	65,839	61,977	184.50	164.00
Strabane	93,830	100,622	429.00	344.50
Strathfoyle	40,223	40,192	84.50	74.50
Suffolk	73,350	52,200	129.00	142.00
Tandragee	25,064	22,900	60.00	77.25

Library	Annual Visits 2009-10	Annual Visits 2010-11	Staff hours per week 2009*	Staff hours per week 2010*
Tullycarnet	33,436	32,850	165.00	102.00
Warrenpoint	44,096	44,100	90.00	90.00
Waterside	59,720	73,850	242.00	238.50
Whitehead	14,100	18,850	56.75	62.75
Whiterock	16,350	61,850	114.00	113.00
Whitewell	1,050	Closed	9.00	Closed
Woodstock	59,350	54,700	163.00	151.00
Total	7,140,099	6,774,010	15,857.59	15,415.18

* As staffing hours can vary considerably Libraries NI have provided the weekly staffing hours in October each year.

Libraries NI

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the original hard copies of newspapers pre-dating 1970 are held by Libraries NI; and how they are stored in order to preserve them.

(AQW 1146/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI hold hard copies of over a hundred newspapers published before 1970. These are located at the following libraries:

	Pre 1970's newspaper titles held
Ballymoney Library	1
Ballymena Central Library (Local Studies Department)	8
Ballymena Regional Administrative Centre	5
Belfast Central	105
Derry Central	3
Larne Library	5
Omagh Library (Local Studies Department)	7
Whitehead Library	2

The very nature of the paper used to produce newspapers means that they are fragile and the more they are used the quicker they deteriorate. In order to minimise deterioration of the bound volumes microfilm versions of many of the titles are available and users are encouraged, where possible, to make use of the microfilm rather than bound copy.

In Belfast Central, the bound volumes are on closed access and can only be accessed on request and under supervision. The bound volumes are shelved on industrial shelving. The area in which they are kept is cool but it does not have the type of environmental controls that are recommended for the preservation of this type of material.

Libraries NI has a small number of holdings of pre 1970s newspapers elsewhere and runs are often incomplete. In Ballymena, Derry Central, Larne and Omagh, the bound volumes are in storage and are retrieved on request. In Whitehead and Ballymoney volumes are for reference only.

Olympic Torch

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had in relation to the route proposed for by the Olympic Torch; and whether there is any intention for the route to include North Down.

(AQW 1180/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has been working closely with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) in relation to the Torch Relay. Consultation was carried out in January 2010 and all 26 councils in the North completed questionnaires to help identify the areas, organisations, projects and iconic sites that the Torch might visit.

A Torch Relay Advisory Group has been established to provide advice and guidance to LOCOG, with representation from key partners including the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

LOCOG has now announced the dates that the Torch will visit the North of Ireland, and the locations for the four evening celebrations. A more detailed route announcement will be made later this year. A seminar with Local Authorities was held on 13 June in Belfast to help them begin to consider how they might best exploit the opportunities available. Representatives from Down District Council attended this seminar and were required to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will terminate the employment of her Special Adviser in view of her refusal to co-operate with the Historical Enquiries Team's investigation into the murder of Mary Travers.

(AQW 1183/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have full confidence in my Special Adviser and I look forward to continuing to work with her in that capacity.

Ulster-Scots Community

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what she is doing to promote the arts within the Ulster-Scots community.

(AQW 1185/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department actively promotes arts within the Ulster-Scots community. There are many activities across the Department. Just a few examples are:

The Ulster-Scots Agency has been working in partnership with the Lyric Theatre in delivering a schools drama project for the last 3 years in 30 schools. Mentors from this project have also worked with Community groups to deliver Ulster-Scots themed drama summer schools in several venues.

The Agency also plans to work with National Museums (and possibly the Arts Council) in August 2011 to develop a Titanic based drama for schools, and excerpts will be acted out by project leaders and visitors to the Folk and Transport Museum on the Bank Holiday weekend in August.

The Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy is supporting a range of projects. One example is a digitisation of the poetry of John Hewitt and other Ulster- Scots poets.

The new Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund has a budget for 2011/12 of just under a million pounds which will provide finance for the production of film, television or other moving image projects relating to the Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and language in the north of Ireland.

Meetings with Organisations

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 658/11-15, to outline the purpose of her meeting with the Ballymurphy Massacre Committee; and what action her Department plans to take as a result of the meeting.

(AQW 1186/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The meeting with representatives of the Ballymurphy Massacre Committee has not yet taken place. The purpose of the meeting will be for them to discuss their plans for a forthcoming play and to seek assistance on sources of funding for the play.

Twelfth of July Events

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will be attending any of this year's flagship Twelfth of July events to promote a Shared Future.

(AQW 1190/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Minister receives invitations to many different sporting and cultural events. She considers all of these invitations and responds appropriately.

Waterways Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff are employed by Waterways Ireland in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1205/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland is 386. Of these 97 employees are based in the North and 289 are based in the South.

Waterways Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the community background of staff employed by Waterways Ireland.

(AQW 1218/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of people working in Waterways Ireland is 386. There is no legal requirement for Waterways Ireland to gather community background information for the 289 staff working in Southern Ireland and as such this information is not available. There are 97 staff working for Waterways Ireland in the North. Of these five are employees of a recruitment agency and Waterways Ireland does not, therefore, have community information in relation to these.

Of the remaining 92 the community background is Protestant 29; Catholic 59 and Others 4.

Annual Support for Organisations Programme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how much of the 2011/12 Annual Support for Organisations Programme (ASOP) funding went directly to community-based organisations in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; (ii) how much of the 2011/12 ASOP funding went to organisations not based in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; and (iii) whether she has any intention of reviewing how ASOP funding is allocated and distributed.

(AQW 1224/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council does not allocate funds based on the social deprivation indices. Decisions are made on the basis of artistic quality and public benefit.

Of the £10,744,048 Annual Support for Organisations Programme Funding allocated in 2011/2012, £8,359,299 was allocated to organisations based in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and £2,384,749 was allocated to organisations not based in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

I have not provided a breakdown of how much of this funding was for Community based organisations, as there is no commonly agreed definition of what constitutes community arts.

My Department has recently carried out an evaluation of the Annual Support for Organisations Programme which included a review of how the funding is allocated and distributed. The initial findings are currently being discussed with the Arts Council. Following these discussions, the Department intends to agree an action plan with the Arts Council around any recommendations that come out of the evaluation and proceed towards implementation.

Somme Association

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding her Department has allocated to the Somme Association in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1243/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following table details the funding my Department has allocated to the Somme Heritage Centre which is owned by the Somme Association, in each of the last three years.

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
30,000	30,000	36,500

Foras na Gaeilge

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff are employed by Foras Na Gaeilge in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1274/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are seven members of staff employed by Foras na Gaeilge in its Belfast Office and 48 permanent and 11 temporary staff in its offices in Dublin, Gaoth Dobhair and Ráth Cairn in the Republic of Ireland.

Capital Projects in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1387/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the next three years from 2011 - 2014 DCAL has no confirmed Capital project plans for the North Down constituency as of now.

Commonwealth Games

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to bid to host the Commonwealth Games in the future, given that Northern Ireland will host a bigger event, the World Police and Fire Games in 2012.

(AQW 1402/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The planning and preparation of any bid to host the Commonwealth Games in the North of Ireland in the future is a matter, in the first instance, for the NI Commonwealth Games Council (NICGC). The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure would be happy to discuss any plans by the NICGC to bid to host a future Games here should the Council decide at any stage to move in that direction and seek my Department's support.

2012 Olympics: Training

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the position on her Department's actions to attract international teams to use local sports training facilities in preparation for the London 2012 Olympics.

(AQO 214/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following assessment, 26 facilities, catering for 22 distinct sporting disciplines were accredited for Olympic sports. Three 'hub' venues suitable for hosting Paralympic disciplines were also accredited.

A working group chaired by Sport NI developed plans, approved by DCAL, to both target national teams for the pre-games training activity and bespoke training and competitive events.

An important strand of the plan, which my Department funded, has been proactive engagement with all Olympic and Paralympic Governing Bodies to develop existing links with respective International Olympic Committees. This work will support the achievement of DCAL's aim of attracting ten countries/visiting teams.

Under the theme 'Raising Your Game in the Land of Legends' this group has promoted facilities and attractions in the North of Ireland to every single International Olympic Committee across the world. Presentations promoting the North of Ireland as a venue have been delivered in China, Germany, Holland, Spain, England, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Presentation has also been made to seventeen Ambassadors from South America including representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru.

For many disciplines the qualification process will not be completed until late Spring 2012, so many small and medium sized countries will not yet be aware of which athletes in which disciplines will obtain the qualification standard. Some larger countries anticipating Olympic qualification have decided to locate their Pre Games Training Camps in specialist training facilities generally nearer London. Significant work is underway and I would refer colleagues to my Written Statement of 15th June for further detail.

As the First Minister and deputy First Minister indicated on the 21st June many are working hard to build a better and brighter future for all in Northern Ireland, the return of violence to our streets damages the local economy and unfairly mars the reputation of the community. The international profile of Northern Ireland has never been higher than it is now. Rioting such as we have seen recently does our reputation real damage.

This is particularly true in respect of our efforts to attract teams to train here in the run up to the 2012 Olympic Games and I wholeheartedly welcome the actions taken by the First and deputy First Ministers to ensure that the tremendous progress we have made in dealing with interface violence is not undermined by these acts of violence and recent rioting in East Belfast.

Ulster-Scots Agency

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the appointment of a new CEO of the Ulster Scots Agency.

(AQO 215/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The recruitment process for the appointment of a new Chief Executive for the Ulster-Scots Agency took place in April 2011.

I am pleased to announce that Mr Ian Crozier was selected as the successful candidate for the CEO position and will take the post on 5 July 2011.

I welcome Mr Crozier's appointment and look forward to working with him.

North West 200

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can give an assurance that she will support the North West 200 event in the future to help maintain its position as one of Northern Ireland's premier events.

(AQO 216/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Investment has responsibility for the management of the NI Tourism Events Fund, with the aim of encouraging new and supporting the development of existing events which deliver the objectives of the draft NI Tourism Strategy.

Libraries NI

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update following the public consultation on the future of libraries.

(AQO 217/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As the Member will be aware the public consultation on the proposals contained in Meeting the Demands for a Modern Public Library Service: Stage 2 ended on 8 April 2011.

I can assure the Member that the Libraries NI Board and Senior Management Team see the public consultation process as being an essential element in the process of taking decisions that may impact communities for years ahead.

Currently the information collected during the Review is being collated and analysed prior to being put to the Libraries NI Board in September 2011. This delay until September is due to the impact of elections on the membership of the Board of Libraries NI.

It is important that the final decisions about the possible closures are made by a full Libraries NI Board including Councillor Members and they have sufficient time to consider the responses to the consultation before being asked to make decisions.

I would stress that no decision has yet been taken on any of the proposals in the Review.

2012 Olympics: Torch Relay

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the process for nominating local people, including any associated deadlines, for the Olympic torch relay.

(AQO 218/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The London Organising Committee's six-week long nomination process for Torchbearers began on 18 May and closes at 11.59pm on Wednesday 29 June 2011. There is less than 36 hours to go, so I would ask each of you to take action now to both nominate someone who has made a difference to your life and encourage your constituents to do the same. It's important that people in rural communities as well as those in towns and cities have an opportunity to participate. We want to see more nominations from Derry, Armagh and Down.

Individuals can nominate another person via the London2012 website: www.london2012.com, by submitting 150 words explaining why their nominee is inspirational. Nominations can also be made over the telephone by dialling the Torchbearer nomination Helpline: 0800 111 6448. Nominees must be 12 years or older at the time of nomination, and you must be 12 or older to nominate someone.

The presenting partners in Northern Ireland – Coca-Cola and Samsung – have also been provided with a number of Torchbearer slots and announced their own nomination systems at the beginning of June. Nominations can be made through their websites. The deadline for nominations via Coca-Cola is 5 September and via Samsung is 30 September.

Arts: People with Disabilities

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to make the arts more accessible for people with disabilities.

(AQO 219/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to ensuring that everyone in our society can access and participate in the arts.

The Arts Council has made a substantial investment over a number of years, creating new opportunities for people with disabilities to be involved in the arts.

It will continue to fund the core cost for organisations such as the Arts & Disability Forum, Adapt NI and Open Arts.

I met with the Arts and Disability Equality Charter Co-Ordinator and representatives from the steering group yesterday and presented awards at the Arts and Disability Equality Charter Awards this morning.

Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department is providing to mark the centenary of the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in 1912.

(AQO 220/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department, through its associated Arms Length Bodies, is providing assistance to a number of projects scheduled in 2012 to mark the centenary of the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant.

Libraries NI has arranged an Ulster Covenant Exhibition to be held in Belfast Central Library, as well as talks on the subject to be given by Roger Dixon (Information Manager, National Museums NI) and John Killen (Director, Linen Hall Library).

NI Screen is providing funding for a documentary on the Covenant to be screened on BBC NI in 2012.

PRONI has provided financial support for the research and publication, and are hosting the launch in September 2012, of Dr Alan Parkinson's book entitled 'Friends in High Places – Ulster Resistance to Irish Home Rule, 1912-1914'.

Garvaghey Sports Complex

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions her Department has had with the Tyrone County GAA Board in relation to their proposals to build a gaelic games training and coaching facility at the Garvaghey sports complex.

(AQW 1429/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Tyrone County GAA Board met with my officials in March 2010 to discuss their proposals to develop a training and coaching facility at Garvaghey. In response, officials advised the Board to bring forward their discussions with Sport NI which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. Since that meeting, the Tyrone County Board have applied to Sport NI's Sport Matters Community Capital Programme for financial assistance towards their project. As a result of this application, Sport NI has placed the project on a call-off list for funding in future years, subject to available budgets. Tyrone GAA has been informed by Sport NI of this decision.

Department of Education

Staff Training Sessions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of (a) conferences; (b) away-days; and (c) staff training sessions held by his Department or its arm's-length bodies in each of the last five years; and (ii) of these, how many were held (a) in-house; and (b) at hotels or conference centres.

(AQW 392/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the tables below.

2006/07

	Number of Conferences Held	Number of Away Days Held	Number of Staff Training Sessions Held	Number Held In-House	Number Held in a Hotel or Conference Centre
Department	9	20	8	0	37
Arms Length Bodies	7	9	283	238	61

2007/08

	Number of Conferences Held	Number of Away Days Held	Number of Staff Training Sessions Held	Number Held In-House	Number Held in a Hotel or Conference Centre
Department	18	24	16	4	54
Arms Length Bodies	9	6	260	212	63

2008/09

	Number of Conferences Held	Number of Away Days Held	Number of Staff Training Sessions Held	Number Held In-House	Number Held in a Hotel or Conference Centre
Department	54	22	37	19	94
Arms Length Bodies	8	28	265	213	88

2009/10

	Number of Conferences Held	Number of Away Days Held	Number of Staff Training Sessions Held	Number Held In-House	Number Held in a Hotel or Conference Centre
Department	17	25	37	28	51
Arms Length Bodies	8	8	237	181	72

2010/11

	Number of Conferences Held	Number of Away Days Held	Number of Staff Training Sessions Held	Number Held In-House	Number Held in a Hotel or Conference Centre
Department	33	8	21	27	35
Arms Length Bodies	6	5	240	226	25

Note: the figures for those events held In-House include events held in any Public Sector premises.

Glenwood Primary School; and Springhill Primary School, Belfast: Proposed Newbuilds

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new builds for (i) Glenwood Primary School; and (ii) Springhill Primary School, Belfast.

(AQW 538/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major capital schemes for Glenwood Primary School and Springhill Primary School are two of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan.

Following the review of capital projects, commissioned by my predecessor, my Department raised issues with the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) in relation to the place of these projects in the wider strategic plans for the area. Specifically, the major capital scheme for Glenwood PS was categorised, as 'partially compliant' as the proposed scheme to extend and refurbish the listed building at Glenwood PS is considered to be expensive for a less than optimal solution and one which needs to take account of wider area issues. The scheme for Springhill PS was categorised, as 'non compliant' as there is a need to review overall primary provision in the local area due to concerns about declining enrolments and the close proximity of two existing small primary schools.

Departmental officials have met with BELB, as the managing school authority, regarding the issues highlighted in each case. While both schools are considered sustainable the Department has sought clarification from the BELB that the location and sizing of these schools is correct for the longer term provision within each area.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. I cannot therefore provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for these schools might be possible.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months and the relevant school managing authorities will be informed of the outcome of my decisions.

Preschool Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many parents chose teacher-led nursery provision as their first and second preference when applying for pre-school places for their children in each of the last five years.

(AQW 589/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that as initial applications for admissions to pre-school places are made directly to providers, if a child is accepted at first preference ELBs have no information on a second preference if one was specified. Therefore, they only record statistics of 1st preferences.

The following Table shows the number of 1st preference applications, from children in their final pre-school year*, for places in statutory nursery schools and nursery units in each of the last five years:

ELB	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
BELB	2632	2590	2666	2854	3119
WELB	2244	2347	2349	2507	2601
NEELB	2699	2808	2774	2952	3067
SEELB	2798	2822	3018	3208	3399
SELB	3284*	3170*	3401*	3484*	3804*
Total	13,657	13,737	14,208	15,005	15,990

* figures from the SELB include applications from underage children

Preschool Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of unfilled pre-school places in the (i) 2008/09; (ii) 2009/10; and (iii) 2010/11 academic years.

(AQW 591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

The numbers of unfilled places in statutory nursery schools and units, at the date of the School Census in October, are as follows:

- (i) 2008/09 - 29
- (ii) 2009/10 - 103
- (iii) 2010/11 - 0

All pre-school providers are required to give priority to applications from children in their final pre-school year. However when undersubscribed with applications for these places, statutory nursery schools and units are, under the open enrolment arrangements, required to consider applications from younger children and allocate available places.

The numbers of statutory nursery places filled by underage children, at the date of the School Census in October, in each of the last three years are as follows:

- (i) 2008/09 - 1520
- (ii) 2009/10 - 1281
- (iii) 2010/11 - 1102

All PSEEP funded places in the voluntary/private sector are open only to children in their final pre-school year.

The Department funds pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector for those children, in their final pre-school year, in attendance each month.

The Education and Library Boards administer the funding for places in these settings. The Department does not hold information in relation to the number of unfilled places in voluntary/private settings.

Nursery School Places

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education how many fully funded nursery school places will be available in the Larne area for September 2011.

(AQW 671/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

The total number of funded places available in the Larne area for September 2011 is 345 - 234 in statutory nursery schools or nursery units and 111 in voluntary /private playgroups.

Preschool Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places were available for children in the North Down area in September 2011, compared to the number of children who were eligible for a place.

(AQW 731/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funded pre-school places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that in the North Down constituency there were 850 funded pre-school places available at the start of the admissions process. (This number reduced to 838 following the decision of a setting in the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme to withdraw its request for funded places.)

A total of 853 applications for a funded pre-school place was received by the SEELB at stage 1 of the admissions process. At the end of that stage 61 children remained unplaced. Forty seven of these applicants stated further preferences for consideration at stage 2 of the process, 3 of whom remain unplaced at the end of stage 2.

At the end of stage 2 there were 17 vacant places in the North Down area.

In addition, the SEELB also advise that they have dealt with a number of late applications which have been received directly by providers in the area and, where places are available these requests have been met. Four late applicants remain unplaced.

As late applications are made directly to providers the total number of places allocated/available in the North Down area will not be known until September /October when the first claims for funded places are processed by the Board.

Teachers: Early Retirement

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have taken early retirement and subsequently obtained a temporary teaching post in each of the last three years.

(AQW 778/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of teachers who have been granted premature retirement and subsequently become reemployed in temporary teaching positions in each of the last three years is as follows:

Financial Year Pension Commenced	Number of Teachers granted Premature Retirement	Number of Teachers Subsequently Re-employed at some point in period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2011
2008/09	306	181
2009/10	180	90
2010/11	0	0

Temporary Variation Enrolment Numbers

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education to detail each school in the North Belfast constituency which has been granted a temporary variation in its enrolment number in the last five academic years

and the 2011/12 academic year, including its initial enrolment numbers and the new number as a result of the temporary variation.

(AQW 810/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools in the North Belfast constituency which have been granted a temporary variation in their enrolment number in the last five academic years, including their initial enrolment number and the new increased number as a result of the temporary variation, are as detailed in the table below. Files detailing the reason for the approval of temporary variations at individual schools are no longer held in relation to all the academic years for which the information is sought. However, records for 2007/08 to 2011/12 are complete. Of the 137 additional places approved during these academic years 129 were approved for children seeking admission to sixth form in line with Departmental policy of supporting the increasing numbers of children wishing to undertake sixth form studies.

For 11-18 post-primary schools, no temporary variations will be approved in the 2011/12 academic year until August / September 2011 when the number of pupils accepted into each school's sixth form are known.

In the last five academic years and the 2011/12 academic year no primary schools in the North Belfast constituency received a temporary variation to their enrolment number.

School Name	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
	App	TV	App	TV	App	TV	App	TV	App	TV
Belfast Model School For Girls	1030	1042	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Little Flower Girls' School	-	-	650	666	650	661	650	680	650	682
Hazelwood College	760	783	-	-	790	814	790	814	-	-
Belfast Royal Academy	1410	1416	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

App = the approved enrolment number

TV = the enrolment number following the approval of a temporary variation

Ministerial Drivers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the arrangements relating to the recruitment, status and payment of his ministerial driver; (ii) whether the arrangements differ from those that were in place prior to 1 April 2011; and (iii) if so, how the arrangements differ.

(AQW 820/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In January 2011 the Executive agreed to transfer arrangements for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers along with the associated budgets to the relevant departments. Prior to this the Department of Finance and Personnel was responsible for providing ministerial transport to my predecessor. My Department has no involvement in the recruitment or other employment arrangements for my driver as he is not a civil service employee.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how many newly qualified teachers obtained a permanent full-time position outside Northern Ireland; and (ii) how many teaching positions were filled by teachers from outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 836/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold information about the number of newly qualified teachers who obtained a permanent full-time position outside the north of Ireland.

The Department of Employment and Learning has advised that while it does not have available information on the precise number of newly qualified teachers who obtained a permanent full-time position outside the north of Ireland, as a proxy, however, estimates have been derived from information collected as part of the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

The estimated number of teacher training course qualifiers from the north of Ireland Higher Education Institutions who were employed in a full-time, permanent or open ended, teaching job, outside the north of Ireland for each of the last available five years is given in the table below.

Information on how many teaching positions were filled by teachers from outside Northern Ireland is not available as it is not collected by the Department of Education or by the General Teaching Council for NI.

Academic year	Estimated Number
2004/05	35
2005/06	33
2006/07	45
2007/08	22
2008/09	22

Notes:

1. Estimates have been calculated by applying percentages from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey to the overall number of students graduating from teacher training courses at the north of Ireland Higher Education Institutions. It is important to note that the DLHE survey has a response rate of approximately 80% and the above figures are therefore an estimate.
2. 2008/09 is the latest year that data are available for.
3. Destinations data are collected approximately six months after qualifiers leave higher education.

Teacher and Teaching Assistant Redundancies

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number and proportion of this year's teacher and teaching assistant redundancies which involved the suppression of a post; and (ii) the reasons for not suppressing a post when making redundancies.

(AQW 866/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Of the 252 teacher redundancies confirmed to date in the 2011/12 financial year, 238 (94.5%) will involve the suppression of a post.

For the period 1 April 2010 to 31 August 2011 of the 185 Classroom Assistant redundancies identified all 100% involved the suppression of a post.

Redundancy arises where an employee is dismissed either:

- because the employer has ceased (or intends to cease) to carry on business; or (more usually)

- because the employer's requirements for employees to carry out work of a particular kind in the place where s/he is employed have ceased or diminished (or are expected to do so).

If, for example, the governors decide that a certain subject should no longer be taught as part of the school curriculum but that there was a greater demand in another subject this could give rise to a curricular redundancy which may not involve the suppression of a post.

Before funding is approved schools are required to certify that the employee has been made redundant under the terms of the Employment Rights (N I) Order 1996. Funding authorities perform a challenge function to verify that proposed redundancies satisfy the redundancy criteria.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 902/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education and the Department of Education and Skills jointly commissioned a scoping study of North South Co-operation in the education sector. Part 1 of the report sets out an analysis of activities over the past five years and is at present with the Minister of Education in the South for his formal approval. I will write to the member with a copy of the report as soon as it is available.

Clerical and Technical Staff in the Voluntary Grammar School Sector

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education whether funding will be provided for job evaluations for clerical and technical staff in the voluntary grammar school sector.

(AQW 914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) conducted a range of Job Evaluations (JEs) from 1995 for their non-teaching staff. Clerical and technical grades were part of the first tranche of staff to be evaluated and ELBs were able to meet the additional costs of implementing the JE process from within their existing resources.

That aside, the agreement on the outcome of the JE process was between the ELBs, as employing authority, and their non-teaching staff. The agreement did not have a direct read across to employees of other employing authorities such as the voluntary grammar school sector. Accordingly, any decision to implement the JE process in respect of particular categories of staff was a matter for the Board of Governors of each Voluntary Grammar School, as employing authority. However, as with the ELBs, DE did not make any funds available to those VG schools who chose to implement the JE process.

My Department did, however, provide funding to the ELBs in 2005 and 2009 following the introduction of the Single Status agreement in 1998 for manual workers. This was due to the large volume of staff to be evaluated. Although this was again an issue for the Board of Governors of voluntary grammar schools as employing authorities, the former Minister for Education, Caitríona Ruane, listened to and took on board the concerns raised by these schools about the potential financial implications and, therefore, without prejudice, made additional resources available to those VGS who wished to implement these job evaluations.

Pupil Underachievement

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what steps he intends to take to address pupil underachievement in Maths and English at GCSE level.

(AQW 949/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have made it a priority to tackle underachievement in literacy and numeracy, so that more of our young people leave school having achieved at least a grade C in GCSE English and maths. This is a level 2 qualification, which is increasingly recognised as the minimum skills level our young people need to contribute to economic growth.

Work is now underway to implement Count, read: succeed – A Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy. This strategy, which applies to all schools, sets out the central role of teachers, supported by parents and school leaders, in tackling underachievement. Teachers are supported to use their professional judgement to identify and address underachievement, including where pupils are being prepared for GCSE English or maths.

The strategy is supported by the other reforms I am advancing to raise standards and tackle underachievement. These include the school improvement policy; the developing early years' strategy; and the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since May 2007, my Department has spent the following on Special Advisers:

(i) Salary, in the following pay bands:

8 May 2007 – 31 March 2008 - £56,100 - £78,540.

1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009 - £57,300 - £79,740.

1 April 2009 - 5 May 2011 - £57,300 - £82,531.

Salary payable from 16 May 2011 is under consideration.

(ii) Pension entitlement is set out in the Model Contract – Letter of Appointment.

(iii) Expenses - £1901.

(iv) Office costs – There were no incremental office costs as a result of Special Advisers using existing NICS DFP provided accommodation.

(v) Other Costs - £2608.

Post-Primary Schools in the Lurgan Area

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of proposals for the development of a pattern of post-primary schools in the Lurgan area.

(AQW 970/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has advised my Department that it initially held meetings with stakeholders from the Post-primary schools in the Craigavon area with a view to developing a strategic plan for the schools in the Two Tier System.

The Board now proposes to issue a consultation document on options for the Lurgan schools to the Boards of Governors of the schools which are part of the system at either Primary or Post-primary level. This will issue in June 2011 with comments to be submitted to the Board by 9 September 2011. The Board will then consider the next stage of the consultation process in the light of the information received from the initial consultation.

When this process is completed the SELB will bring forward its proposals for post-primary provision in the Lurgan area for consideration by the Department.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the costs incurred to date by the pilot Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 972/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the costs to date in respect of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority are set out in the table below:

	05-06 £'000	06-07 £'000	07-08 £'000	08-09 £000	09-10 £'000	10-11* £'000	Totals £'000
ESA Implementation Team	-	258	1,032	1,909	2,697	2,314	8,210
RPA Policy & Legislative Team	107	956	832	810	580	21	3,306
Totals	107	1,214	1,864	2,719	3,277	2,335	11,516

* Figures for 2010-11 are as at 31 March 2011 and are unaudited.

These costs are an 'invest to save' measure. The establishment of the ESA will release £20 million per year from unnecessary bureaucracy and will provide more effective arrangements for raising standards, planning the education estate and ensuring access to the curriculum on the basis of equality.

A considerable amount of work has been done in preparation for ESA. A range of operational and back office services which can be moved from the current nine organisations to the new authority over a period of time have been explored.

Work on the development of common terms and conditions of staff is well advanced, along with the implementation of consistent workforce strategies for recruitment and re-deployment. This will create a cohesive system for the non-teaching workforce for all aspects of HR support including industrial relations, employee welfare and general workforce development.

A robust ICT infrastructure has been created to support schools and the wider education service. Common ICT platforms have been designed and implemented across the sector. Existing organisations are linked on one robust network covering multiple sites. Common helpdesk, intranet and internet facilities have been created. Software licensing has been centralised, delivering savings through economies of scale, and common practices and standards have been agreed.

The ESA Implementation Team has designed and is currently implementing, in shadow form, a new financial reporting system including a single finance and accounts system. This system provides access to a range of important management information across the education sector for the 2009-10 financial year which is instrumental to convergence planning and the creation of regionalised services. This system will support ESA.

Common policies and procedures to underpin effective information governance across both schools and the nine affected organisations are being completed. This work is based on the identification and sharing of best practice across organisations and incorporates the most recent developments in information governance within the NICS.

Shared Teaching Between Schools

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of (i) the current level of shared teaching between schools; and (ii) the total savings that could be achieved in all school types by the use of this practice.

(AQW 973/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold information on and is not aware of the numbers of teachers that are shared between schools. However, we do know from the experience of specialist schools which have been working closely with partner primary, post-primary and special schools and from the collaborative arrangements developed by many post-primary schools that there are many benefits that can be gained through sharing and working together. These are benefits that can be shared at teacher, school, pupil and community level.

While it is not possible to quantify savings, it is clear to me that collaboration and joint working can avoid unnecessary duplication of provision within local areas and can therefore provide schools with opportunities to reduce costs and deliver value for money while also enhancing opportunities for their pupils.

School Budgets

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, given that an estimated 80 per cent of a school's budget is used for staff salaries, what steps he is taking to protect school budgets from cuts rather than administration budgets.

(AQW 975/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) equates to almost 60% of the education budget, so it will be difficult to protect this budget in its entirety.

My core priorities are to raise educational standards and target education inequalities, reduce bureaucracy, drive-up efficiency and eliminate duplication. The savings measures in place to enable the department to live within budget are therefore aimed at protecting spend on these priorities and bearing down on administration and duplication. My clear intention is to minimise the impact on frontline services in the classroom.

Given the tough budget settlement, I intend to work with my Executive colleagues in the months and years ahead to help alleviate pressures on the education budget.

Agreement on the establishment of ESA will ensure greater consistency and efficiency in service delivery. Without it, scarce resources will continue to be spent on unnecessary bureaucracy and spread too thinly over existing institutions.

Preschool Places

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, given that research indicates a £7 return for every £1 of investment in pre-school places, how many additional places he intends to fund in future.

(AQW 976/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The policy for pre-school provision currently relates to "a place for every child whose parents wish it" thereby reflecting its non-compulsory nature. In planning for the overall demand, the Department took account of surveys in the early phases which indicated that about 10% of parents do not want a pre-school place for their child, for a number of reasons. The remaining 90% of children, and more in recent years, have availed of the opportunity of pre-school education in all settings, including the Irish medium.

There has been steady investment in funding for pre-school provision over the years. Following an unprecedented demand for funded pre-school places in the 2009/10 school year, the then Minister announced additional funding of up to £1.3m to provide places for those children unplaced at the end of the pre-school admissions process in May 2010. In setting the budget for 2011/12 the increased level of funding allocated for PSEEP took into account the increasing demand for places caused by an upturn in the birth rate and an increase in the number of newcomer children.

Approximately two thirds of funded provision is in the statutory sector with the remaining third delivered through pre-school settings in the voluntary/private sector. In 2010/11 there were more than 22,500 children in funded pre-school education. Of these, over 14,000 children attended statutory nursery school and units, and over 7,500 in funded places in voluntary/private settings.

For the forthcoming school year there are approximately 22,800 funded pre-school available places, and the vast majority of parents who applied for a funded pre-school place for their child have been facilitated.

In terms of overall provision, the Department will seek to improve the current level of take up and will continue to work with the Education and Library Board's to ensure the best possible match of places to demand.

Teacher:Pupil Ratio

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to reduce the teacher to pupil ratio in schools.

(AQW 977/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Beyond the requirements that apply to Foundation and Key Stage 1 pupils, pupil:teacher ratios are not determined by the Department as it is for the Board of Governors and Principal of each school to determine the setting of teaching and non-teaching staff complements through use of their delegated budget.

Research evidence suggests that, except during the very early years, there is little correlation between class size and pupil outcomes. Rather the main factor in raising standards is high quality teaching supported by strong and effective leadership.

The Department's policy position reflects and has been informed by this evidence. Our policy is that our youngest pupils, those in Foundation and Key Stage 1, should not be educated in classes of larger than 30. The Department of Education monitors the class sizes requirement and also recently issued a Circular to all grant-aided primary schools to remind them of their statutory responsibility. Where it is appropriate, Education and Library Boards can provide funding to cover the costs of an additional teacher. They also have the power to approve an exception to the class size requirements for one year only in order to avoid unreasonable public expenditure or for other valid reasons, for example to facilitate a direction by an admissions appeal tribunal or by an ELB or in response to a school attendance order or specific provisions in a statement of special educational needs.

Within all stages of a child's education in school, our focus is also on supporting and promoting high quality teaching and learning and our school improvement policy is designed with this purpose in mind.

Skill Levels in the Workforce

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning regarding the improvement of skill levels in the workforce through curricular action in primary and post-primary schools.

(AQW 978/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I met earlier this week with the Minister for Employment and Learning and we discussed a range of issues, including the important contribution that both Departments will be making to the development and implementation of the Executive's new economic strategy. The success of that strategy will depend on us having a workforce with the skills, creativity and flexibility to respond and adapt to new opportunities.

Our focus on rebuilding and rebalancing our economy demands a renewed focus on raising skills levels in literacy, numeracy and ICT at every level from primary school right through to sixth form, work which, I am pleased to say, is well underway. My Department, together with DEL, is taking action to develop a STEM skilled workforce with an emphasis too on the building of the personal, social and employability skills in young people that employers tell us they need. My Department also continues to work with DEL to ensure access to a coherent and effective provision of education and training for the 14-19 age group and on our joint careers strategy and has an important contribution to make to wider work to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

I welcome this continued and regular engagement and am keen that, at all levels, we continue this joint working for the benefit of our young people.

Rural Primary Schools with Low Enrolments

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether he has considered group management solutions for rural primary schools with low enrolments in order to keep sites open wherever possible.

(AQW 981/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am clear that we need to develop a more sustainable pattern of school provision, particularly to deal with the challenges facing rural communities. In moving forward we need to be innovative and creative when developing solutions and this will include considering opportunities for increased sharing, collaboration and co-location.

In the first instance it is the responsibility of school managing authorities to bring forward proposals for education provision that meets the needs of local areas. In doing so they must be able to demonstrate that schools are viable and sustainable in the longer term. I can assure you that any proposals coming forward for shared management arrangements will be considered carefully by my Department taking account of the needs of the children and the local context.

This will be done within the framework outlined in the Policy for Sustainable Schools which recognises explicitly the challenges facing small rural schools as they strive to deliver high quality education. This is reflected in the lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools and the accessibility criterion which provides guidance on home to school travel times.

Departmental Staff

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the current salary levels and number of staff employed by (i) the Department of Education; (ii) the Education and Library Boards; (iii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iv) the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments; (v) the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards; (vi) the Youth Council for Northern Ireland; (vii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; (viii) the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and (ix) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

(AQW 1037/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current salary levels and number of staff employed are as follows

Organisation	Staff Numbers	Salary Range
(i) Department of Education	582.60	£14,981 - £205,000*
(ii) Education and Library Boards	12186	£11,664 - £101,551
(iii) Council Catholic Maintained Schools	70	£12,488 - £83,448
(iv) Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	350	£13,190 - £73,000
(v) Staff Commission	6	£12,488 - £51,866
(vi) YCNI	15	£14,981 - £62,407
(vii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	13	£15,039 - £49,043
(viii) General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland	16	£12,489 - £80,460
(ix) Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education	12	£15,725 - £53,664

* this denotes the maxima of the salary scale for a particular grade and does not infer any member of staff is on that salary point.

Proposals for Newbuilds

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to list all (i) development proposals; and (ii) proposals for new builds that are awaiting a decision by his Department.

(AQW 1057/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) There are currently 19 Development Proposals which have been published, but for which a decision has yet to be taken. These are listed in Table 1 below. Only at the end of the 2-month statutory consultation period can I consider all information pertinent to a DP and make my decision.
- (ii) The Department's current Investment Delivery Plan contains proposals for new builds at 53 schools which are awaiting a decision by my Department. These are listed below at Table 2.

In addition I would inform you that there are in excess of 100 proposals in the early stages of development logged with my Department. However, none of these have been announced for funding.

TABLE 1 LIST OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

DP	School	ELB	Published	Objection Period Ends	Description
205	Gaelscoil na Mona	BELB	07/04/11	07/06/11	New statutory Irish-medium nursery unit
258	Gaelscoil Eanna	NEELB	14/03/11	14/05/11	New statutory Irish-medium nursery unit
259	Braid PS	NEELB	12/04/11	12/06/11	Closure
260	Lourdes PS Whitehead	NEELB	13/04/11	13/06/11	Closure
220	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	SEELB	22/03/11	22/05/11	New statutory Irish-medium nursery unit
221	Connor House Prep Dept Bangor GS	SEELB	22/03/11	22/05/11	Closure of Prep Dept
255	Bocombra PS, Portadown	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	New statutory nursery unit
256	Drumadonnell PS, Ballyronney	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	New statutory nursery unit
257	Orchard County PS	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	New statutory nursery unit
258	Waringstown PS	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	New statutory nursery unit
259	Seagoe PS	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	Additional nursery unit
260	St Mary's PS, Banbridge	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	Additional nursery unit

DP	School	ELB	Published	Objection Period Ends	Description
261	St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	Convert Reception Class to a Nursery Unit
262	Portadown Int PS	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	Additional nursery unit
263	Gaelscoil Ui Neill	SELB	21/04/11	21/06/11	Extend capacity from 5 to 7 class base.
264	St Francis of Assisi PS, Keady	SELB	26/05/11	26/07/11	New statutory nursery unit
216	Jones Memorial PS	WELB	6/04/11	06/06/11	Autistic Spectrum Disorder Class for KS1& Learning Support Class for KS2
217	St Mary's Boys' PS & St Mary's Girl's PS	WELB	05/05/11	05/07/11	Amalgamation
218	Portora Royal School	WELB	04/05/11	04/07/11	Co-Educational Post 16 provision

TABLE 2 SCHEMES ON INVESTMENT DELIVERY PLAN LISTED BY EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD

Schools	Board Area
Colaiste Feirste	BELB
Glenwood PS, Edenderry NS	BELB
Greenwood Assessment Centre	BELB
Little Flower	BELB
Methodist College	BELB
Mitchell House Special School	BELB
Springhill PS	BELB
Strandtown PS	BELB
Victoria College	BELB
Victoria Park PS (Strand & Sydenham)	BELB
Ballymoney High	NEELB
Dromore Central PS	SELB

Schools	Board Area
Edendork PS	SELB
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	SELB
Lurgan College	SELB
Portadown College	SELB
St Bronagh's PS	SELB
St Clare's and St Colman's PS	SELB
St Joseph's Convent PS	SELB
St Louis' Grammar, Kilkeel	SELB
St Mary's PS Banbridge	SELB
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	SELB
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	SELB
St Patrick's Grammar, Armagh	SELB
St Teresa's PS Lurgan	SELB
Tannaghmore PS	SELB
Artigarvan PS	WELB
Arvalee Special School	WELB
Ballykelly PS	WELB
Belmont Special School	WELB
Dean Maguirc College	WELB
Devenish College	WELB
Ebrington PS	WELB
Eglinton PS	WELB
Enniskillen Model PS	WELB
Foyle & Londonderry College	WELB
Loreto College, Omagh	WELB
New Buildings PS	WELB
Omagh Integrated PS	WELB
Rossmar SS (Limegrove / Glasvey)	WELB
St Columbkille's PS	WELB
St Conor's PS	WELB
St Paul's PS, Irvinestown	WELB

Classroom Assistants

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many teachers and classroom assistants have been made redundant in the current academic year to date, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board; and (ii) education sector.

(AQW 1058/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: From the start of the current academic year until 21 June 2011, 12 Classroom Assistants and 14 teachers have been made redundant, as set out in the table below;

Education and Library Board Area	Classroom Assistants	Teachers
Belfast	2 Controlled	8 Controlled 2 Maintained
Western	4 Controlled	0
North Eastern	0	0
South Eastern	0	2 Controlled 1 Maintained 1 Grant Maintained Integrated
Southern	4 Maintained 2 Controlled	0

Teaching Schools

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to follow the lead of the Education Secretary in England, to set up teaching schools, along the lines of teaching hospitals, so that teachers can be trained on-the-job using a system of mentoring.

(AQW 1074/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans in the foreseeable future to establish Teaching Schools here.

Our schools and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have complementary roles in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), with each having a distinctive and particular contribution to make to the professional development of student teachers. HEIs offer students an academic and professional framework of courses around which students' development as competent teachers will be built, whilst placement schools provide students with the necessary practical experience of teaching.

The current ITE programmes here aim to strike the correct balance between theory and practice, and a significant proportion of a student's time is spent in school settings: 32 weeks on the 4-year BEd programmes; 24 weeks on the one-year Post-Primary PGCE programmes; and 18 weeks on the one-year Primary PGCE programmes. During this time, and in order to broaden their experience, students teach a range of classes appropriate to their phase and specialist area in at least two schools. They are supported by an experienced teacher (teacher-tutor) and are able to observe a variety of teachers and a range of teaching styles.

On foot of the Teacher Education Review consultation exercise, the Department plans to review the school placement arrangements for ITE students to ensure that placement schools are fully supporting student teachers in line with guidance and policy direction.

The HEI-based ITE programmes here have been fully accredited by the General Teaching Council as being fit for purpose and as providing a professional preparation which enables students successfully completing such programmes to register with the Council to teach in our schools. In addition, recent

Education and Training Inspectorate reports on the ITE programmes have assessed the quality of provision as being of a high standard.

In the light of the factors outlined above, I see no pressing need to introduce Training Schools here.

Possible Federations, Confederations and Mergers Between Schools

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education for an update on work that is being carried out in preparation for possible federations, confederations and mergers between schools across different education sectors.

(AQW 1076/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In moving forward we need to be innovative and creative when developing solutions and this will include considering opportunities for increased sharing, collaboration and co-location. I can assure you that any proposals coming forward for shared management arrangements will be considered carefully by my Department taking account of the needs of the children and the local context.

In the first instance it is the responsibility of school managing authorities to bring forward proposals for education provision that meets the needs of local areas. In doing so they must be able to demonstrate that schools are viable and sustainable in the longer term.

As yet, no formal proposals have been submitted to my Department by school managing authorities in this regard.

Nursery School Places

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many children in the Upper Bann constituency have not been allocated a nursery school place for September 2011; and what action he intends to take to address this shortfall.

(AQW 1084/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that their information on provision in the Upper Bann constituency is based on figures for Craigavon and Banbridge District Council Areas. The information relates only to those children in their final pre-school year.

In the Craigavon Borough Council Area there were 105 target age children unplaced at the end of Stage 1 of the procedure (1 April 2011). Of these 41 nominated a further preference and 35 were placed in Stage 2 of the procedure.

In the Banbridge District Council Area there were 47 target age children unplaced at the end of Stage 1 of the procedure (1 April 2011). Of these 26 nominated a further preference and 20 were placed in Stage 2 of the procedure.

The Board has secured additional funded places to address a shortfall of places in the Craigavon Borough Council Area through afternoon sessions in two existing voluntary playgroups, both of which were allocated 16 additional places. A new provider was also brought into the Programme.

In addition a number of Development Proposals for new or additional Nursery Units at existing primary schools are being studied by the Department.

In the Banbridge District Council Area one new provider was brought into the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme and allocated 15 funded places. Development Proposals are also at consultation stage for new nursery units at two existing primary schools.

Nursery School Places

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether his Department monitors birth rates in the Belfast area to determine the number of nursery school places required.

(AQW 1085/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While my Department retains policy and budgetary responsibility for the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, the planning and implementation at local level is the responsibility of the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGS) within each Education and Library Board. These groups undertake an annual review of provision at local level taking into account factors such as demographic changes and the relocation/closure of settings, in order to ensure that the allocation of places to voluntary/private sector providers continues to meet the needs of each area.

The management of pre-school places is a complex process. The information which is available from NISRA only provides the projected number of children in an age band based on birth rates in a particular year down to district council level. There is no statistical data available at a local level which provides detailed information on the projected number of children which will be in their final pre-school year – those aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 2 months – each September.

In addition, whilst statistical projections can indicate an overall rise, they cannot predict specifically where increased demand will occur, and what proportion of parents in any given area will want a pre-school place for their child. Therefore the P1 number, which is collated as part of the annual School Census, is used as a proxy for the size of the pre-school cohort. This method is considered to be the most accurate way of predicting likely demand in an individual locality. Other factors, such as birth rate figures, are taken into account but they are of limited use as they cannot be disaggregated below District Council level. The numbers of newcomer children in a given area, and whether parents will request full-time or part-time provision are also factors which cannot be predicted.

Nursery School Places

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of nursery school places available in each nursery in the South Belfast area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1086/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of nursery school places available in each nursery in the South Belfast area, in each of the last five years has been 52 places, except for Rosetta Primary, Fane Street Primary, Botanic Primary and Loughview Primary schools which had 26 places. Scoil An Droichid has had 26 places in the last three years since it opened.

Music Therapy Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education which special needs schools have been affected by the withdrawal of funding for Music Therapy Services.

(AQW 1090/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that given other extensive pressures on the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety's (DHSSPS) budget and the priorities competing for that funding, that DHSSPS is not in a position to continue funding the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust which provides music therapy in special schools.

I have been advised by the chief executives of the education and library boards that the following special schools have been affected by the withdrawal of funding for music therapy services.

Belfast Education and Library Board

- Glenveagh

North-Eastern Education and Library Board

- Castle Tower
- Hill Croft
- Riverside
- Roddensvale
- Sandelford

South-Eastern Education and Library Board

- Clifton
- Knockevin
- Parkview
- Tor Bank

Southern Education and Library Board

- Sperrinview
- Lisanally
- Rathore

Western Education and Library Board

- Arvalee
- Elmbrook
- Foyleview
- Knockavoe
- Rossmar

Enterprise and Entrepreneurship

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 618/11-15, to detail (i) the programmes designed to promote (a) enterprise and entrepreneurship; and (b) the activities relating to work experience and career-related activities; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the funding allocated to external bodies for the provision of these services.

(AQW 1093/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My department provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people and to undertake activities designed to help provide schools with links to the world of work and pupils with work experience.

A list of these programmes and the funding allocated in 2011-12 is provided in the table below

Provider	Programmes delivered	DE funding 2011-12
Young Enterprise NI	Ourselves Our Families Our Community Our City Our Nation Our World Company Programme Team Programme Quickstart Your School Your Business Moving On Project Business Enterprise in Action Learn to Earn Personal Economics Success Skills Presentation Skills Study Skills Industry Masterclass Entrepreneurship Masterclass	£650,000

Provider	Programmes delivered	DE funding 2011-12
Sentinus	Industry Challenge Primary Challenge STEM Ambassadors STEM Experience Robotics & Family Days Sector Skills Challenge STEM Design Challenge STEM Careers Programme STEM Careers Roadshows Crest Awards Industrial Bursary Scheme Insight into Careers Formula 1 Challenge Industry R&D Challenge Young Innovators Employability Skills STEM Experience for Special Schools	£400,000
School Employer Connections	Work experience placements Class study visits Work open days	£110,000
Charter Work Experience	Work experience placements Work inspiration programmes Work open days	£100,000
Business Education Partnerships	Careers conventions Careers workshops Business insight days Business open days Interview skills programmes	Approximately £290,000 (final disbursement of grant to be determined)

Joint Efficiency Review Stage Two Report (PEDU)

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education when the recommendations contained in the Department of Education and the Department of Finance and Personnel's Joint Efficiency Review Stage Two Report (PEDU) will be published and made available to the public.

(AQW 1108/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The second stage of the Joint Efficiency Review on Home to School Transport and School Catering Services is currently being undertaken by the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU). The work is expected to be concluded with the publication of a report over the summer. The report will be made available to the Education Committee and on the Department's website.

Programme for Government for 2011-2015

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the development of key education priorities for the Programme for Government for 2011-2015.

(AQW 1109/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work on developing the priorities for the Programme for Government for 2011-2015 is being led by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. As a member of the Executive, I will be engaging with my Ministerial colleagues on that work, and will be highlighting the importance of education to the Programme.

Foyle and Londonderry College and Ebrington Primary School

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education when he intends to announce the commencement of the move by Foyle and Londonderry College and Ebrington Primary School to a new site in Clooney.

(AQW 1110/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I now need to consider how the available funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

The proposed major capital schemes for Foyle College and Ebrington Primary School are two of 53 schemes on the Investment Delivery Plan. The schemes are at an early stage of planning, with the Stage C submission (initial sketch plans and costs) approved by the Department on 21 March 2011. It is the intention to hold the projects at their current stage until such times as it is decided, which, if any, projects can be advanced.

Unfortunately, therefore, I cannot provide you with any indication as to when Foyle College and Ebrington Primary School will move to the Clooney site.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teacher vacancies in the (i) integrated; and (ii) maintained education sectors.

(AQW 1121/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the tables below.

(I) NUMBER OF TEACHER VACANCIES IN THE 2010/11 ACADEMIC YEAR IN INTEGRATED SCHOOLS AT 1 NOVEMBER 2010.

	Primary	Post-Primary
Full-Time Permanent Vacancies	0	3
Full-Time Temporary Vacancies	2	2
Part-Time Permanent Vacancies	0	0
Part-Time Temporary Vacancies	0	1
Total Vacancies	2	6

(II) NUMBER OF TEACHER VACANCIES IN THE 2010/11 ACADEMIC YEAR IN CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS AT 1 NOVEMBER 2010.

	Primary	Post-Primary
Full-Time Permanent Vacancies	22	10
Full-Time Temporary Vacancies	9	5
Part-Time Permanent Vacancies	3	2
Part-Time Temporary Vacancies	7	1
Total Vacancies	41	18

Source: Teacher Vacancy Survey

Note:

- 1 Number of vacancies is for classroom teachers only.
- 2 Primary Catholic Maintained figures include 1 special school.
- 3 "Integrated" includes Grant-maintained and Controlled Integrated Schools.

Lisanelly Education Campus

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the current state of negotiations and consultations with primary schools in the Omagh area regarding participation in the proposed Lisanelly Education Campus.

(AQW 1134/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of the Lisanelly Education Campus is the development of post-primary education facilities. There are no plans for primary education facilities on site.

However, I recognise that as the primary schools in the area will play a vital role as feeders for the post-primary schools on the new campus, their inclusion and involvement in the process is very important.

I can confirm that all principals and chairs of Boards of Governors of primary schools in the area were invited to attend a seminar held in March 2011 regarding the Lisanelly Campus and that follow-up visits to individual schools were offered.

This support will continue to be available to the local primary schools throughout the process. I further expect that the post-primary schools involved with the project will continue to cultivate the strong links they already have with their feeder schools.

Preschool Places

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 231/11-15, for the South Antrim constituency, to detail (i) the names of the schools which offer funded pre-school places; (ii) the number of remaining pre-school places available for September 2011; and (iii) the total number of pre-school places filled in the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 1137/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following table shows a breakdown of pre-school provision in South Antrim. As the information supplied in response to AQW 231/11-15 was based on funded pre-school provision in the South Antrim area, which crosses the boundaries of Antrim and parts of Newtownabbey District Council areas, this further information has been provided on the same basis.

Pre-School Provider	Places Remaining for Sept 2011 *	Total Places Filled in the 2010/2011 * *	District Council
Mount St Michael Ps NU	0	53	Antrim
St Joseph's Ns, Antrim	0 FT 0 PT	26 FT 52 PT	Antrim
St Joseph's Ps Nu, Crumlin	0 PT	104	Antrim
St Oliver Plunkett Ps Nu	0 PT	26	Antrim
Steeple Ns	0 PT	156	Antrim
Templepatrick Ps Nu	0 PT	52	Antrim
Ashgrove Ns	0 FT 0 PT	26 FT 52 PT	Newtownabbey
Ballyclare Ns	0 PT	156	Newtownabbey
Ballyhenry Ns	0 FT	52	Newtownabbey
Earlview Ps Nu	0 FT	26	Newtownabbey
Monkstown Ns	0 FT 0 PT	26 FT 52 PT	Newtownabbey
Mossgrove Ps Nu	0 PT	52	Newtownabbey
Mossley Ns	0 FT 0 PT	26 FT 52 PT	Newtownabbey
Rathcoole Ps Nu	0 FT	52	Newtownabbey
St Bernard's Ps Nu	0 PT	52	Newtownabbey
St James' Ps Nu	0 FT 0 PT	26 FT 52 PT	Newtownabbey
Whitehouse Ps Nu	0 FT	52	Newtownabbey
Playgroups			
Abc Day Nursery	0	28	Antrim
Crumlin Integrated Pre-School Playgroup	0	9	Antrim
Little Hands Pre-School	1	8	Antrim
Laughterland Early Years, Toomebridge	0	15	Antrim
Maine Integrated Playgroup	0	17	Antrim
Muckamore Pre-School	0	26	Antrim
Naiscoil Ghleann Darach, Crumlin	0	15	Antrim
Randalstown Community Playgroup	0	20	Antrim
Round Tower Playgroup	1	22	Antrim

Pre-School Provider	Places Remaining for Sept 2011 *	Total Places Filled in the 2010/2011 **	District Council
St Comgall's Playgroup	0	24	Antrim
Taylorstown Playgroup, Toome	0	22	Antrim
Thrushfield , Templepatrick	0	20	Antrim
Tannaghmore Playgroup	9	New provider for 2011/12	Antrim
Tiny Tots Pre-School, Toome	0	23	Antrim
Glengormley Playgroup	0	45	Newtownabbey
Greendale Day Nursery	0	17	Newtownabbey
Kilbride Playgroup	1	17	Newtownabbey
Mallusk Community Playgroup	0	8	Newtownabbey
Newtownabbey Methodist Mission Playgroup	2	17	Newtownabbey
Naiscoil Eanna, Glengormley	1	24	Newtownabbey
St. Bernard's Playgroup	0	16	Newtownabbey
St Macnissi's Playgroup	0	14	Newtownabbey
St. Mary's-On-The-Hill Playgroup	0	24	Newtownabbey
Tiny Tots Centre	0	12	Newtownabbey
TIR-na-NOG Pre-School	0	17	Newtownabbey

* The total number of places remaining for September 2011 is taken at 22 June 2011.

** The total number of places filled in the 2010/2011 academic year is taken as at the date of the School Census in October 2010.

Holy Trinity Primary School, West Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education, in relation to Holy Trinity Primary School, West Belfast, (i) what action his Department has taken, or intends to take, in relation to the flooding and drainage problems that occur during periods of heavy rain; (ii) whether there are any plans for a window replacement scheme; (iii) whether he would consider extending speech and language therapy for mainstream children with speech difficulties who attend this school; and (iv) whether it is possible for P2 children to have a Classroom Assistant.

(AQW 1159/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to the questions you have raised in relation to Holy Trinity Primary School:

- (i) Minor Works to resolve the flooding and drainage problems are proceeding in two phases. Phase 1 was approved on 1st November 2010 at a cost of £17,000 and is now complete. Phase 2 is proceeding within the 2011-12 Minor Capital Works programme. It is estimated to cost £121,000 and work will commence on the site in the near future.
- (ii) An application has been received for replacement windows at the school. The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has confirmed that, while all windows identified will need to be replaced in the future, there is one block in the school in which the windows need to be replaced as soon as practicable. These priority works costing in the region of £25,000 will proceed in 2011-12 Minor

Works programme and will be managed by the BELB. The remainder of the works required will be registered on the Minor Works database and will be considered when finance becomes available.

- (iii) The issue surrounding Speech and Language Therapy being extended for mainstream children with speech difficulties who attend this school is one that would need to be addressed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
- (iv) In relation to your query on a Classroom assistant this is a matter for the School Principal and Board of Governors who have responsibility as to how best to deploy staff in their schools.

Statementing Process for Children with Dyslexia

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking, in conjunction with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to address the difficulties associated with the statementing process for children with dyslexia.

(AQW 1160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the education and library boards (ELBs) which are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making special educational provision for children with special educational needs (SEN), in their areas. When an ELB decides to make a statutory assessment, the timeframe is set out in the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005.

Boards have 26 weeks to complete a statutory assessment of a child's SEN and to issue, if appropriate, a completed final statement, subject to permitted exceptions. In the course of the statutory assessment and statementing process advice will be sought from all relevant bodies including the relevant health and social services trust. This process is the same for all children with SEN including those with dyslexia.

The Department of Education (DE) has set a target in the ELBs' resource allocation plans requiring ELBs to adhere to this timeframe. All ELBs have reported that, subject to permitted exceptions, this target is currently being met. DE is not aware of any specific difficulties associated with the statementing process for children with dyslexia.

The statementing process was among the issues addressed within the consultation document on the review of special educational needs and inclusion and, as proposals from that review are finalised, any issues which are relevant to the health sector will be discussed with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety.

Newbuild for Scoil Na Fuiseoige, Twinbrook

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education what action his Department intends to take to address the projected deficit of two classrooms in the plans for the new build for Scoil Na Fuiseoige, Twinbrook.
(AQW 1162/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department uses standard methodologies for the calculation of Long Term Enrolments (LTE) for all schools involved in major capital works projects. For primary schools this is based on the average of the schools' intakes in years 1-3. The LTE is reviewed on an annual basis during the planning of the project to ensure that schools are built at the right size. The figure is agreed with the school managing authority.

The Department must be consistent in its approach to the provision of accommodation for new school building projects. To do so it adheres to the schedules of accommodation, set out in the school Building Handbook, which are based on LTEs. The Building Handbook recommends that new buildings should, where possible, be located so as to allow for future expansion should demand dictate.

The new Scoil na Fuiseoige represents an investment of almost £1.7 million. This is to provide a five classroom school which is designed to accommodate 116-145 pupils. There are no plans to increase the number of classrooms currently being constructed as the school is correctly sized based on the

agreed LTE of 119. However should the enrolment numbers significantly increase in the future the Department will reassess the accommodation needs of this school.

Nursery and Preschool Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of nursery and pre-school places available in the North Down area in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1171/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below shows the number of funded pre-school places available in the North Down area over the last 10 years.

PROVISION IN NORTH DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

Providers	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Statutory nursery	442	494	494	494	494	494	468	468	468	468
Voluntary/ private	280	254	297	269	266	299	314	304	314	359
Total	722	748	791	763	760	793	782	772	782	827

Education and Library Board: Appointment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many councillors proposed by their local council for appointment to an Education and Library Board are still awaiting approval from his Department.

(AQW 1173/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I appointed 15 councillors to the Education and Library Boards on 23 June 2011. All of these councillors had previously been members of the respective Boards up until the May elections, and following the elections the relevant Council confirmed to the department that the councillor was being nominated again for the Board. The processes with six other Councils are continuing and further appointments will be made when those processes have been completed.

Education and Library Boards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many councillors have been appointed to Education and Library Boards in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1174/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Reason for Appointment	Number
2009	Vacant posts as a result of resignations	3
2010	2010 Reconstitution	15 (appointed December 2010)
2011 to date	2010 Reconstitution	9 (appointed Jan/Mar 2011)
	Re-appointments following May 2011 elections	15

Teacher:Pupil Ratio

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what is the current teacher to pupil ratio.
(AQW 1179/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The overall Pupil - Teacher Ratio (PTR) in 2010/11 is 16.8 and is routinely published on the DE website.

St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Belfast.
(AQW 1188/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are two proposed major schemes for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, both of which are at Economic Appraisal stage. One scheme is to address the main school provision and the other is in relation to the provision of a sports hall. However, the Department has not agreed to fund these projects.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools' estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

In addition, the Department has not yet been notified of the findings of the Commission for Catholic Education Post Primary Review. The outworkings of the review may also impact on a number of proposed major capital schemes, including that for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School.

I therefore cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when the proposed major capital schemes for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School might be possible.

Gaelscoil na Móna, Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the development proposal for Gaelscoil na Móna, Belfast.
(AQW 1193/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposal No 205, for the proposed establishment of a single full time nursery unit at Gaelscoil na Móna from 1 September 2011 or as soon thereafter, was first published on 7 April 2011 by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). However the Development Proposal was not explicit on the pattern of attendance and had therefore to be republished on 2 June 2011 to ensure that the intent of the proposal was clear. The associated statutory 2-month consultation period which commenced on the date of re-publication ends on 2 August 2011.

After the 2-month consultation period ends, I will consider all information pertinent to the proposal and make my decision. The relevant parties will be informed of my decision at that time.

St Louise's College, Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education to detail the outcome of the new build feasibility study that was completed three years ago for St Louise's College, Belfast.
(AQW 1195/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major scheme for St Louise's College has not been agreed for funding and is therefore not on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. However, it is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage of planning, in this case Feasibility Study (FS) stage. The FS was submitted in July 2009 but has not been progressed due to a number of factors, mainly the lack of capital resources. Also my Department is awaiting the outcome of the Commission for Catholic Education's

Post Primary Review which will determine the long term strategic direction for the maintained sector and may impact on a number of proposed major capital schemes, including that for St Louise's College

My Department is facing significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and in view of this I want to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools' estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

I cannot therefore provide you with any indication as to if or when the proposed major capital scheme for St Louise's College might be possible.

Antrim Borough Council: Schools

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how many children living in the Antrim Borough Council area attend a school outside the council boundary.

(AQW 1209/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below.

CHILDREN LIVING IN THE ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA WHO ATTEND A SCHOOL OUTSIDE THE COUNCIL AREA – 2010/11

School type	Total pupils resident in Antrim Borough Council area	Number of pupils attending a school outside Antrim Borough Council area
Primary	5,241	568
Post-primary	4,373	2,508
Special	114	70
Total	9,728	3,146

Source: school census.

Note:

1 Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Irish-medium Schools

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail the Irish-medium schools attended by children from the Antrim Borough Council area; and the number of children from this area in each school.

(AQW 1211/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below.

IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY CHILDREN WHO ARE RESIDENT IN ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA – 2010/11

School name	School type	Total pupils
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Primary	*
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal	Primary	*
Gaelscoil na Mona	Primary	*
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	Primary	41
Colaiste Feirste	Post primary	9

Source: school census

Note:

Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

‘*’ denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

Mobile Phones to Departmental Staff

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of providing mobile phones to departmental staff in each of the last three years, including the cost of handsets and bills.

(AQW 1212/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The costs of providing mobile phones to departmental staff in each of the last three years, including the cost of handsets and bills, are shown in the following table:

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
£000	£000	£000
55	51	62

Draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the results of the consultation on the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy with particular reference to education; and (ii) whether, in light of the consultation responses, his Department plans to redraft its key priorities.

(AQW 1241/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The results of the public consultation on the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy are not expected before the end of June. As my Department has not had sight of the results, I am unable to comment further.

Extended Schools and Full Service Schools Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education (i) which initiatives, under the Extended Schools and Full Service Schools Programmes, are designed to raise standards by fostering a culture where education is valued and parents work in partnership with schools; and (ii) for his assessment of any such initiatives to date.

(AQW 1244/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: Extended Schools receive additional resources to provide targeted support services for those children and young people most in need. Extended Schools and Full Service Schools establish effective partnerships with statutory and voluntary/community organisations that work closely with children and families on a range of issues including increasing the value placed on education by parents and the wider community.

- (i) The Extended Schools and Full Service Schools programmes offer a range of activities aimed at overcoming barriers to learning including a range of programmes aimed at promoting parental and community engagement and supporting educational development.
- (ii) The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Extended Schools report in July 2010 updates previous evaluations and records that in almost 90% of cases where Extended Schools are serving disadvantaged communities effectively significant improvements are evident in the educational outcomes and the personal and social well-being of pupils. The following independent evaluations of the activities and services provided through the Full Service programmes, alongside the 2009/10 Annual Reports for both programmes demonstrate the emerging success of these programmes:

FGS McClure Watters – Evaluation of the Full Service School Project – June 2008;

FGS McClure Watters – Evaluation of the Full Service Community Network – March 2011.

I have arranged for copies of these documents to be placed in the Assembly library. The 2010 ETI Extended Schools evaluation is available on the ETI website and can be accessed via the following link: <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2010/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools-july-2010.pdf>

Prevailing Youth Culture Outside Schools

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what action his Department intends to take to counter the prevailing youth culture outside schools, which does not value education and undermines the work of schools and limits a pupil's achievements.

(AQW 1245/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have made it a priority to tackle underachievement and promote equality and the raising of standards across education. I want to work collectively with a range of sectors within and outside education to ensure that those at greatest of risk of educational underachievement are supported to reach their full potential. I believe that by fostering a more collaborative approach, involving all educational stakeholders, we can secure much needed improvements in the entire education system.

The Department of Education seeks to engage young people through a range of policies and related actions, including early interventions in the class room, and through the extended and full service schools programmes which seek to address barriers to engagement and learning.

Non formal education through youth work can have a profound impact on the lives of all children, but is particularly relevant for marginalised young people, those falling through the net of formal education or those whose needs are outside of the mainstream. Participation in youth work is voluntary. For those young people who choose not to be involved outreach and detached youth workers are deployed across all board areas to engage young people in their own environment. The Department is developing a new policy for youth work which will provide a framework for the effective delivery of services in the coming years.

Shared Classes Between Schools

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years (i) to detail all shared classes that have taken place between schools; (ii) to detail all shared classes that have taken place which involved cross-community involvement; (iii) the estimated savings made as a result of these classes; and (iv) for his assessment of how shared classes can be further developed to increase integrated education.

(AQW 1248/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested. However, I know that many schools do work together on a cross-sectoral basis at a number of levels, including as partner schools to specialist schools; in delivering a wider range of courses for pupils at Key Stage 4 and above; and in many other areas, including the provision of out-of-school sporting and enrichment activities. Of the schools that participated in the 2010/11 Extended Schools programme, for example, 453 (96%) worked in partnership with neighbouring schools involving cross-phase or cross-sector working.

I believe that schools working together to share resources and expertise can enhance the educational experience for the whole school community and can help to break down barriers – actual or perceived – through joint working. Schools working collaboratively in Area Learning Communities, for example, are able to reduce duplication and provide new opportunities for pupils that otherwise might not be available. One of the most positive developments over the last number of years has been the role the special schools sector has played in increasing collaborative delivery for pupils at these schools in partnership with mainstream schools.

Transfer 2011

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education whether legal action has been taken against his Department in relation to Transfer 2011; and if so, to detail the outcome of the case.

(AQW 1250/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No legal actions have been taken against the Department of Education in relation to Transfer 2011.

Errors in Examination Papers

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the recent errors in examination papers; (ii) the number of pupils affected; and (iii) the awarding bodies involved in each case.

(AQW 1277/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been 10 reported incidents this summer involving errors in examination papers from a number of awarding bodies. The details are outlined in the table below.

Awarding organisations have procedures in place to ensure that marking is fair to all candidates and the qualifications regulators have emphasised to the awarding organisations that no candidate should be disadvantaged by errors within papers.

Awarding Org	Subject	Nature of Error	Total number of candidates	NI candidates
OCR	GCE AS Maths	The paper included two incorrect expressions which made it impossible for the candidates to prove them.	6,790	3
OCR	GCSE Latin	There were 3 errors in this paper all involving the use of the incorrect name of the writer of, or character in, the Latin passage.	7,920	105
OCR	GCE A2 Physics	A question contained two conflicting units of measurement; centimetres and metres, when both should have been metres.	7,707	58
CCEA	GCE Further Maths	A question contained a plus sign instead of a minus sign.	122	122
CCEA	GCSE Business Studies	There was an error in one cell of a table of data.	3,440	2,891
AQA	GCE AS Business Studies	Candidates were not given a profit figure to calculate a question.	41,612	738
AQA	GCE AS Geography	A figure which should have read 0.05 was printed as 0.5.	19,000	185
AQA	GCE AS Computing	A diagram within one question was inaccurate causing possible confusion.	3,651	59
AQA	GCSE Maths	An error occurred during the printing of additional copies of the paper which resulted in the insertion of questions from a previous paper.	31,659	tbc*

Awarding Org	Subject	Nature of Error	Total number of candidates	NI candidates
Edexcel	GCE AS Biology	There was an error in a multiple choice question in the paper.	17,003	0

* 52 centres in Northern Ireland entered for this examination. To date 2 NI schools with a total of 10 students have been identified as having received affected papers. A further school has been identified as potentially having received affected papers and we are awaiting confirmation from AQA on the number of students.

Newly Qualified Teachers in Voluntary Playgroups

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how his Department recognises the experience gained by newly qualified teachers in voluntary playgroups.

(AQW 1278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Qualified teachers employed in voluntary playgroups are not employed on teachers' terms and conditions of service. However, Boards of Governors have the discretion to take into consideration any previous teaching or non-teaching experience when deciding on the salary placement of a newly appointed teacher. Guidance issued by the employing authorities recommends that non-teaching experience should be gained in paid employment and should be directly relevant to the teaching post to which the teacher has been appointed. In deciding on the relevance of non-teaching experience, Boards of Governors should be satisfied that it is of comparable quality and standard to teaching.

Experience in a setting such as a voluntary playgroup may also be considered as contributing towards completion of the Induction stage of a beginning teacher's career, subject to arrangement with the Education and Library Boards' Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS) on appointment to the post. In this context, it would be for CASS to assess, through a portfolio of evidence maintained by the beginning teacher, whether the criteria for the successful completion of Induction have been met.

Special Schools: Enniskillen

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Western Education and Library Board's proposal to amalgamate the Erne Special School and Elmbrook Special School in Enniskillen.

(AQO 227/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am pleased to confirm that I have recently approved the Development Proposal to amalgamate Erne and Elmbrook Special Schools which will take effect from 1 September 2012.

I welcome the strategic approach which the Board has developed for Special School provision for the Enniskillen area. I believe the amalgamation will result in a more inclusive school, which can only benefit the children it serves. This proposal will enable the pupils to benefit from a more flexible and wide ranging programme of services and avail of increased opportunities for social and educational interaction and development for both pupils and staff.

Preschool Education Expansion Programme

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Education how many children in total have successfully obtained pre-school places since the introduction of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in 1998.

(AQO 228/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the introduction of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in 1998, and including the 2010/2011 school year, 257,926 children have received a funded place in a pre-school setting broken down as follows:-

Year	Statutory Nursery	Voluntary/ Private	Reception	Total (Excluding Reception)	Total
1998/99	8850	1945	2521	10795	13316
1999/00	9999	3407	2330	13406	15736
2000/01	11931	3957	1990	15888	17878
2001/02	13105	5340	1474	18445	19919
2002/03	14092	5804	1180	19896	21076
2003/04	14014	5913	1044	19927	20971
2004/05	14016	5939	883	19955	20838
2005/06	14224	5633	754	19857	20611
2006/07	14158	6327	658	20485	21143
2007/08	13953	6535	630	20488	21118
2008/09	14095	6629	607	20724	21331
2009/10	14151	6744	590	20895	21485
2010/11	14408	7599	497	22007	22504
Total	170996	71772	15158	242768	257926

Education: Procurement

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to explore the potential of joint procurement policies with his counterpart in the Dublin Government.

(AQO 229/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Public Procurement policy in the north is the responsibility of the Procurement Board and reflects the policy objectives of the Executive. The Board develops its policies in the context of the EU Procurement Directives and the UK Implementing Regulations. As the EU Directives also apply in the south there is a uniform approach governing public procurement in the two jurisdictions.

I understand that the Central Procurement Directorate (DFP) has provided support to the development of a new National Procurement Service, OPW, that has responsibility for putting in place pan-government arrangements across the south of Ireland. Early discussions have taken place with this unit on future opportunities for all-island procurements.

I have recently met with my counterpart in the Department of Education and Skills and we have discussed opportunities collaboration on a north-south basis. I have asked my officials to explore of the potential for joint procurement within the education sector on an all island basis.

Special Educational Needs

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education what policies or protocols are in place for parents of children with special needs who may need to engage with a school regarding their child's specific needs.

(AQO 230/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is essential for the parents of children with special educational needs to have the opportunity to engage with the school and education and library board to ensure their child's special educational needs are met. The role of parents and their legal position are set out in the Education (NI)

Order 1996 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005). Specifically Article 8A of the 1996 Order highlights the duty on the Board of Governors of a school to inform the child's parents that special education provision is being made for them at the school because it is considered that they have special educational needs.

Protocols leading from this legislation are contained in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the subsequently published Supplement to the Code. The Code stresses the importance of establishing effective relationships between parents and schools. Copies of these documents are available from my Department's website or alternatively a hard copy has been placed in the Assembly Library for your perusal.

Preschool Education

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of a child's right to free pre-school education.

(AQO 231/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The policy for pre-school provision currently relates to "a place for every child whose parents wish it" thereby reflecting its non-compulsory nature. There are some who might suggest that pre-school should be a statutory right, and legally enforceable.

It remains that while the benefits of pre-school education are widely known, making pre-school a compulsory phase of education would not only require changes to the legislation, but would remove parental right to choose whether it is appropriate, or fits in with wider family life, for their child.

It should also be borne in mind, that our children are already younger, at four years old, in starting compulsory education, in comparison to other European countries where children do not formally start school until six.

You are also aware that I have agreed to undertake a review of the pre-school admissions criteria. Work is currently underway to draw up a Terms of Reference for this review.

Schools: Nurture and Citizenship

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what financial assistance he will offer to schools for nurture and citizenship programmes in the current mandate.

(AQO 232/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Citizenship is already an integral part of the revised curriculum in all our schools and schools receive a delegated budget that should allow them to deliver all aspects of that curriculum.

Our youngest children now follow a curriculum that, as well as having a clear focus on literacy and numeracy, provides opportunities to explore issues such as learning to live as a member of a community. By the end of primary school, children are developing their awareness of the importance of playing an active and meaningful part in the life of their community. At post-primary school, they are focusing on their roles as both local and global citizens. Embedding these opportunities within the curriculum ensures that young people are able to develop their understanding of the importance of being a good citizen and the personal and social skills they need to play their full part in their community, now and in the future.

As well as making use of their delegated budgets, schools can access advice, support and teaching material from the NI curriculum website and from CCEA and the Education & Library Boards. Additionally, my Department has worked in partnership with Amnesty International to make the "Lift Off" resource – which addresses important aspects of citizenship relating to respecting the rights of others - available to all primary schools here.

Turning to Nurture Programmes, my Department is aware of the work of two units that are currently supported via the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. Unfortunately my Department does not have the resources available to fund nurture programmes at this time.

Irish-Language Documents

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to outline the total cost, including staff costs, to his Department, since 2000, of translating, publishing and circulating departmental documents in Irish.
(AQO 233/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total cost is £289,410. This represents the cost of translating departmental documents in Irish from 1 April 2001 until 31 March 2011, using the service-wide translation contract, and printing costs. The Department does not hold details of any costs prior to 1 April 2001 and printing costs are not available for all years. Specific staff and postage costs associated with the translating, publishing and circulating of departmental documents in Irish are not held. The Department of Education has employed two Irish Language Staff Officers from 2008 to April 2011 and one Irish Language Staff Officer from April 2011 to date to facilitate its use of Irish. The Irish Language officer undertakes a range of duties, including urgent translation work. The costs incurred in carrying out specific tasks are not separately calculated. For information, the Staff Officer salary range is currently £26,197 - £30,520 per annum.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages places obligations on Government Departments to promote and encourage the use of regional or minority languages in public life. There are duties under the Good Friday Agreement in relation to linguistic diversity, including the Irish language. The St Andrew's Agreement also refers to the need to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. There are a significant and growing number of Irish speakers in the north of Ireland and there is an increasing demand for Irish medium education. My Department's use of Irish reflects the need to communicate with Irish speakers in their language of choice.

Education: Area Plans

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what action he will take to ensure that adequate and up-to-date area plans are in place for education provision.
(AQO 234/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that the establishment of ESA would streamline administrative processes and enhance strategic planning. ESA, when established should have operational responsibility for Area-based Planning. ESA should produce area plans with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders for submission to the Department for approval.

Until such times as full area based planning can be delivered my Department is looking at how existing processes can be re-engineered to ensure that a strategic approach to planning is developed in the "spirit" of area planning as envisaged for ESA.

Department for Employment and Learning

Undergraduate Teaching Places

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of undergraduate teaching places in each of the last five years.
(AQW 835/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The cost to my Department of funding undergraduate teaching places at St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges in each of the last five years was as follows:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total Cost of Grant	£10,539,998	£10,563,294	£8,605,604	£8,370,001	£8,138,313
Average Cost per Student	£7,165	£8,088	£7,136	£7,420	£7,522

These figures include standard teaching grant and additional funding towards other costs including those associated with recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds or of supporting students with disabilities.

In addition, there is a cost to my Department of providing student support for each of these places. While the actual cost per student will vary depending on individual circumstances, the estimated cost of support for undergraduate teaching places at the colleges in each of the last five years was as follows:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Estimated Total Cost of Student Support	£3,068,506	£3,131,788	£3,145,248	£3,325,344	£3,397,480
Average Cost of Student Support per Student	£2,086	£2,398	£2,608	£2,948	£3,140

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast: Proposed Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when will the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast be made public.

(AQW 846/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed discontinuance of the College and its proposed merger with Queen's University was conducted by Stranmillis University College. This was put out to public consultation in June 2010. The Governing Body subsequently prepared a report on the results of the consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment in October 2010. This has been published on the College's website and has been available to the public for some time.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast: Proposed Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any other options considered in addition to the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 847/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Governing Body of Stranmillis University College developed a business case to consider the various options open to the College. Seven options were considered and are detailed below:

Option 1: status quo

Option 2: stand alone as an independent degree awarding institution

Option 3: rationalisation of the site

Option 4: closure of Stranmillis University College

Option 5: collaboration either with St Mary's, University of Ulster or Queen's University

Option 6: merger with St Mary's or with an existing School of Education within a university

Option 7: Federation of Teacher Education

Stranmillis University College Site: Rationalisation

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an estimate of the cost of the rationalisation of the Stranmillis University College site if the merger with Queen's University, Belfast, did not proceed.

(AQW 849/11-15)

Dr Farry: Rationalisation of the Stranmillis site was one of the options considered as part of the December 2009 economic appraisal commissioned by Stranmillis University College. The appraisal considered all costs and income flows over a twenty-five period. I have set out below a summary of the costs and income flows, as detailed in the appraisal, which would be incurred or earned by the College over the twenty-five years should the proposed merger not go ahead. This would result in a total net cost of £56.1m.

	£'000s
Capital Refurbishment	9,413
Recurrent maintenance	18,750
Recurrent Income	(185,607)
Recurrent Costs	213,562
Net Cost	56,118

Apprenticeships

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many people completed an apprenticeship, funded by his Department, in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many of these people gained employment immediately as a direct result of completing an apprenticeship.

(AQW 894/11-15)

Dr Farry: Apprentices are in paid employment from the commencement of their training. The following apprenticeship frameworks, funded by my Department, were completed in the last three years:

2007/08 – 1,661

2008/09 – 2,428

2009/10 – 4,565

My Department introduced Programme-Led apprenticeships for those young people who wished to follow an apprenticeship but could not find employment due to the economic downturn. The outcomes for the first cohort of programme-led apprentices, who commenced training in September 2009, will be known when these young people have completed their 2 years in training.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Stranmillis University College has been within budget in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 939/11-15)

Dr Farry: Stranmillis University College has provided the information shown in the table below for the last three academic years.

	Academic Year		
	2007/08 £'000s	2008/09 £'000s	2009/10 £'000s
Actual Surplus/(Deficit)	388	3	891
Budgeted Surplus/ (Deficit)	23	104	488

In 2008/09 a new funding method was introduced which linked funding to student numbers. Stranmillis received funding to ameliorate the impact of the change on its finances. It received a total of £50,000 conversion funding in the year. If this conversion funding had not been provided, Stranmillis would have sustained a deficit of £47,000 instead of its reported surplus of £3,000.

Conversion funding totalling £171,000 was provided in 2009/10. If this is removed from the actual surplus figure, the surplus reduces to £720,000. However, it should be noted that the actual surplus in 2009/10 was not a typical reflection of performance for several reasons.

Firstly, an adjustment in the year as a result of the application of Financial Reporting Standard 17 (Retirement Benefits) resulted in Stranmillis receiving a credit of £697,000 in respect of Other Pension Costs included in its overall Staff Costs. This compares to a charge of £134,000 in the previous year. Had the adjustment not taken place, the College would have sustained a surplus of just £23,000.

Secondly, Stranmillis was able to increase its income in the year from its residences, catering operations and the hire of facilities. The increase in Other Operating Income was £588,000, equivalent to a 43% increase.

These two factors need to be considered together. Had the College not been able to increase its Other Operating Income so significantly and had the pension adjustment not taken place, the College would have returned a deficit. It is unlikely that Stranmillis will benefit from another pension adjustment in the near future and it is believed that competition and the overall economic climate will significantly reduce its Other Operating Income.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) under the business case, the projected losses for Stranmillis University College if the proposed merger with Queen's University, Belfast does not proceed; and (ii) how these projected losses were calculated.

(AQW 940/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) The Business Case prepared by Stranmillis University College considered a range of options open to the College. One of these was the status quo option (Option 1). This considered what would occur should no merger take place and the College remained as an independent institution. It is considered that this option is closest to the question raised and figures below show the surplus or deficit anticipated in the business case over the five years 2008/09 to 2012/13.

	2008/09 £'000s	2009/10 £'000s	2010/11 £'000s	2011/12 £'000s	2012/13 £'000s
Surplus/(Deficit)	103	(68)	(639)	(1,194)	(1,720)

- (ii) The projected figures shown in the table above have been taken from the projections contained in the Business Case. As the Business Case was commissioned by the College, information on how the projections were prepared is contained within it. The Business Case sets out the assumptions upon which the income and costs of Option 1 were based. This is publicly available on the College's website and can be accessed at www.stran.ac.uk/informationabout/theuniversitycollege/mergerdocuments/

Career Education and Guidance

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he intends to take to improve career education and guidance in further and higher education colleges and universities.

(AQW 952/11-15)

Dr Farry: In January 2009 my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Education, launched 'Preparing for Success', the all age Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Strategy and Implementation Plan.

To support the strategy, the Department of Education issued guidance to assist schools, further education colleges and training organisations to improve the quality of learning opportunities and to encourage greater cohesion in the provision of CEIAG across schools, further education (FE) and training organisations. The Education and Training Inspectorate has also issued guidance to schools, colleges and training organisations in relation to the quality of CEIAG provision.

Matters relating to the provision of careers education and guidance are the responsibility of each FE College. However the FE Sector continues to work in partnership with my Department's Careers Service to support the delivery of its Careers Policy through a Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Service. Partnership Agreements between the Careers Service and the further education colleges are currently under review.

In relation to higher education, each university is responsible for the provision of student support services, including careers education. There are a number of services and initiatives available to higher education students locally. I have placed these details of these in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website.

A steering group comprising of representatives from my Department, the Department of Education, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Business Alliance has been established to oversee implementation and evaluation of "Preparing for Success". The further and higher education sectors have been invited to nominate representatives to ensure that the strategy is effectively communicated to and informed by these groups.

ERASMUS Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students attended the ERASMUS Programme in each of the last two years, broken down by the higher education institution attended.

(AQW 956/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details the number of Erasmus study and work placements undertaken by students from Northern Ireland for 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic years.

Institution Name	2009/10			2010/11 (Interim)		
	Study	Work	Total	Study	Work	Total
Queen's University Belfast	72	117	189	104	105	209
Stranmillis University College,	22		22	16		16
St Mary's University College	29		29	38		38
University of Ulster	48	48	96	74	40	114
North West Regional College					4	4
Totals	171	165	336	232	149	381

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 1052/11-15)

Dr Farry: Salary costs are provided in terms of the salary bands for Special Advisers. Since May 2007, Special Advisers have been paid salaries from within the following pay bands:

Pay Band A £35,120 minimum to £51,775 maximum

Pay Band B £56,100 minimum to £82,531 maximum

The amount spent on Special Advisers in relation to pension contributions, expenses, office costs and other costs since May 2007 by the Department for Employment and Learning is as detailed in the table below:

Pension Contributions	£ 37,307.95
Expenses	£ 29,649.55
Office costs	£ 561.00
Other costs	£ 3,159.12
Total costs	£ 70,116.62

Private Sector Training Organisations

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many private sector training organisations are currently contracted by his Department to provide training, including on the job training.

(AQW 1131/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department is contracted with 29 private sector training organisations to provide training, including on the job training.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: CEO

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to 3/11-15, whether the bonus payment for the CEO of Invest NI was mandatory or payable only if sought by the office holder.

(AQW 586/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The bonus payment for the CEO is a contractual provision. It is the responsibility of the Chairman of the Board to make a recommendation, based on the achievement of targets, to the Minister on the amount of bonus to be paid each year. The postholder has no input to the process.

Foreign Direct Investment Visits

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the foreign direct investment visits that have taken place; and (ii) the number of jobs created as a result of the visits in the (a) East Londonderry; (b) Foyle; (c) Mid-Ulster; (d) West Tyrone; (e) Belfast East; (f) Belfast West; (g) Belfast North; and (h) Belfast South constituencies.

(AQW 760/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not possible to align individual visits with specific employment related foreign direct investment (FDI) projects. A company may visit a number of times before making the decision to invest, in which case it could be said that each visit has resulted in job promotion. On the other hand, a company may visit once, make an initial investment and then follow this up with further investment. In this case the one visit would have resulted in more than one investment project.

- (i) In the last three financial years, Invest Northern Ireland hosted 679 FDI inward visits to all Parliamentary Constituency Areas (PCAs). Of these, 493 visits took place in the specified PCAs of East Londonderry, Foyle, Mid-Ulster, West Tyrone, Belfast East, Belfast West, Belfast North and Belfast South.
- (ii) In the same period, Invest NI promoted 6,954 new jobs across the specified PCAs.

FDI INWARD VISITS (CREDIBLE1) BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (PCA).

PCA	Financial Year			Total
	2008-092	2009-10	2010-11	
Belfast East	85	34	47	166
Belfast North	13	17	22	52
Belfast South	96	48	54	198
Belfast West	13	12	7	32
East Londonderry	2	5	2	9
Foyle	7	13	10	30
Mid Ulster	4	0	0	4
West Tyrone	2	0	0	2
Total	222	129	142	493

Notes:

1. A credible visit is defined as one where Invest NI can claim to have promoted a DCA or PCA by bringing a potential inward investor, who has an identifiable project proposal, to that area.
2. Includes visits as a result of the USNI Conference in May 2008.
3. In addition to the above listed visits, Invest NI has also facilitated a number of visits by other organisations e.g. influencers, overseas governments and trade bodies, which serve to strengthen FDI & Trade links in overseas markets.

NEW JOBS PROMOTED BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA (PCA).

PCA	Financial Year			Total
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	
Belfast East	1,089	395	925	2,409
Belfast North	117	471	66	654
Belfast South	358	641	703	1,702
Belfast West	92	46	5	143
East Londonderry	58	72	63	193
Foyle	217	264	365	846
Mid Ulster	356	228	177	761

PCA	Financial Year			Total
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	
West Tyrone	71	105	70	246
Total	2,358	2,222	2,374	6,954

Notes:

1. New jobs promoted are those jobs that are expected to be created by the project.
2. 2008/09 figures include the Bombardier C Series project – 836 jobs promoted.
3. Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Broadband for Rural Areas

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that all residents in rural areas have access to high speed broadband.

(AQW 801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I met with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on 2 November 2010 in relation to the Rural White Paper and broadband was discussed at that meeting. In addition, our respective officials have met on a number of occasions and will continue to do so as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are represented on the project board for my Department's Next Generation Broadband Project. The aim of this project, which is being delivered by BT, is to bring higher speed broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011. However through the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract, residential consumers can also access these higher speed services through the new fibred access points. Details of where these upgrades are located can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com or www.nibroadband.com.

Business: Bureaucracy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 89/11-15, how many small businesses/micro-firms will benefit from the reduction in EU red tape for businesses with a net turnover of less than £434,000 per annum or fewer than 10 employees.

(AQW 843/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In June 2010 (the latest figure available) there were 62,413 VAT registered Northern Ireland businesses with a turnover of less than £434,000 or fewer than 10 employees.

EU Red Tape for Small Businesses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment from what accounting requirements will small businesses/micro-firms be exempt in comparison to larger businesses, as a result of the reduction in EU red tape for small businesses.

(AQW 844/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This is not a matter for my Department; but for the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Companies House in Cardiff.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has raised the possibility of a reduction in Air Passenger Duty with HM Treasury as a means of stimulating the local economy.

(AQW 859/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I and Executive colleagues have raised the impact of Air Passenger Duty on Northern Ireland with HM Treasury Ministers. APD impacts on all business sectors and in particular on long haul flights which are important for Foreign Direct Investment and tourism. The current rates of APD are the highest in Europe and place Northern Ireland at a significant disadvantage.

It was disappointing that the Budget 2011 did not announce a reduction in APD, however HM Treasury have frozen APD rates and are consulting on the structure of the duty.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has been leading on the Northern Ireland response to the HM Treasury consultation. My officials have worked closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure that a strong case has been put to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

EU Red Tape for Small Businesses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much of the estimated £300 million savings as a result of the reduction in EU red tape relates to small businesses/micro-firms.
(AQW 874/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the answer provided to Question 844/11-15

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that she, or her predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 895/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since May 2007 as Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment, I have attended two Plenary North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings on the 5th July 2010 and 21 January 2011. My predecessor, Nigel Dodds, attended one Plenary NSMC meeting on the 17 July 2007.

I have attended Tourism Sectoral meetings of the NSMC on the following dates: 29 May 2008, 1 April 2009, 16 December 2009, 16 June 2010 and the 3 February 2011. I have also attended NSMC Trade and Business Sectoral meetings on the following dates: 8 July 2009, 16 December 2009, 30 June 2010 and 12 November 2010. Nigel Dodds attended a NSMC Tourism meeting on the 8 November 2007 and a NSMC Trade and Business meeting on the 29 May 2008.

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. This details the matters discussed, the decisions taken and the names of Ministers who attended from each jurisdiction.

After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which she intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 897/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI Schemes, projects and initiatives that have received co-operation from Government Departments and other organisations in the Republic of Ireland fall into the following areas:

Telecoms Infrastructure

- (i) Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) in relation to Project Kelvin and Broadband Awareness Campaign/Make IT secure

The Letterkenny Institute of Technology and DCENR in relation to NIBEST cross Border Broadband Project.

Community Network Services and DCENR in relation to the North West Cross-Border Community Broadband Project.

Monaghan County Enterprise Board and DCENR in relation to the Armagh Monaghan Digital Corridor.

- (ii) There are no departmental telecoms schemes, projects or initiatives planned for which co-operation will be sought from these bodies.

Energy

- (i) The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) and Regulatory Authorities in relation to the Single Electricity Market, Common Arrangements for Gas, Security of Supply, All Island Grid Study, All Island Gas Study and an Off Shore Renewable Energy Environmental Assessment.

- (ii) DETI are currently undertaking an On Shore Renewable Electricity Strategic Environmental Assessment, part of this process will involve notifying DCENR of any transboundary issues towards the end of 2011.

There is likely to be co-operation on legislative issues in relation to the Single Electricity Market.

InvestNI

- (i) Enterprise Ireland in relation to: Research and Development projects, Business networks, Renewable Energy Clusters, Think Outside Box Awards, Cross border Pilot Enterprise Incubation programme, Competence Centre Programme, Design and Innovation Initiatives, Framework Seven Programme, EU Innovation Relay and Enterprise Europe Network, Enterprise Ireland International Selling Programme, Carbon Measurement, Design and Innovation Initiatives, US –Ireland partnerships.

Irish Centre for Business Excellence in relation to visits by Lean practitioners from the US.

Bord Bia in relation to sharing overseas exhibition space, market research and intelligence.

Failte Ireland in relation to Invest NI VISA marketing programme.

Industrial Development Authority in relation to the North West Technology Zone.

Sustainable Energy Authority for Ireland, National Off shore Wind Association of Ireland and Marine Institute Ireland in relation to energy studies and projects.

- (ii) Future work with Enterprise Ireland on Leadership and Management programme, maximising Renewable Technological Sector, Innovation capability of SME's and Innovation Voucher programme.

Geological Survey of Northern Ireland.

- (i) Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and/or DCENR in relation to Tellus Border project, European Geoparks Network , geological maps website, research into geothermal sites, carbon capture and storage, collaborative geological research, Water framework Directive.

Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin in relation to geological research.

Cavan County Council in relation to Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark.

- (ii) Future work with Cavan County Council in relation to Border Uplands and Harnessing natural resources. Also collaboration with GSI and Irish National Commission to UNESCO in relation to global geoparks initiative.

Credit Unions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she intends to establish a fund, similar to the Modernisation Fund provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, to help Credit Unions to develop services in areas of social deprivation.

(AQW 915/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no current plans to establish a fund similar to the Modernisation Fund operated by the Department for Work and Pensions.

My prime focus is on working with the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and Her Majesty's Treasury on making the legislation needed to bring about the transfer of regulatory responsibility from DETI to the FSA. When in place this will allow Northern Ireland credit unions to seek to offer members the same range of services as their Great Britain counterparts, members' savings will be covered under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, and members will have access to the Financial Services Ombudsman Scheme. This is expected to be completed by March 2012.

However I also propose to hold discussions with the local credit unions' representative bodies about the services their members provide particularly in areas of social deprivation, and how they might be further developed.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to air passenger duty, what action she intends to take to ensure that Northern Ireland will be treated on a no less favourable basis than the Republic of Ireland to ensure fair competition between airlines and airports on the island of Ireland.

(AQW 919/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The impact of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on Northern Ireland is exacerbated because of competitive pressure from the Republic of Ireland, which has become even more acute following the Irish Government's decision to reduce, and possibly remove altogether, their equivalent tax.

I and Ministerial colleagues have made representations to HM Treasury Ministers on the impact of APD on Northern Ireland. During his visit to Northern Ireland on 17 June 2011 the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to APD and the particular challenges presented by Northern Ireland's land border with the Republic of Ireland.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has led on the Northern Ireland response to an HM Treasury consultation on the reform of APD. My officials have worked closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure that a strong case has been put to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

Camden Group, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any discussions with the Camden Group, Antrim, in relation to possible redundancies.

(AQW 934/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On the 24 February 2011, I was with the Camden Group when it announced £16m investment in a project which would lead to the creation of an additional 225 jobs in Northern Ireland.

My Department was made aware on the 20 May 2011, that the Camden Group, Antrim had commenced a review of the business. The review included placing the workforce on notice.

My officials from Invest NI met with members of Camden's Senior Management Team on 24 May 2011. At the meeting, the company stated that they were at the early stages of the review process. The Senior Management Team gave assurances that plans for growth remain in place, redundancies would

be kept to a minimum and emphasised that the review was necessary given the prevailing economic conditions.

Invest NI remains in close contact with the Camden Group regarding the outcomes of the business review and will keep me apprised of the situation.

Hospitality Sector

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what jobs have been secured in the hospitality sector over the last four years; and what actions are being taken to increase the number of jobs in this sector in the next four years.

(AQW 937/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not possible to provide an exact measure of the number of jobs secured in the hospitality sector over the last four years. However, estimates from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) can be used to provide the net change in employee job levels in the "Accommodation and Food Service Activities" (which includes hotels and restaurants) sector during this period*.

The latest estimates from the QES show that at March 2011 there were 38,600 employee jobs in the Accommodation and Food Service Activities sector. This represents a decrease of 670 (-1.7%) from the March 2007 figure of 39,270.

While there has therefore been a slight decline in the number of hospitality jobs in the last four years, I am confident that this trend will be reversed as we seek to grow and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy.

In particular, my Department is leading on the draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland which contains targets to increase visitor numbers and spend to 4.5 million and £1 billion respectively by 2020. The Strategy includes a range of actions across government and the private sector to meet these targets. It is anticipated that achieving these targets through the delivery of the action plan will create some 10,000 jobs by 2020, many of which will be in the hospitality industry.

* Users of QES data should be aware that the sampling methodology used to derive employee jobs estimates in NI has been extended, resulting in a discontinuity in the QES employee jobs series from the reference period September 2009 onwards. Hence users should now exercise caution when comparing estimates pre September 2009 with those after this period. For more detailed information regarding the discontinuity and its impact please see following link below. <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-qes/stats-qes-discontinuity-notice.htm>

Consumer Council

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether the Consumer Council overpaid staff from 2003-2009; (ii) how much was overpaid; and (iii) who was the Chairperson of the Consumer Council when the overpayments occurred.

(AQW 938/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested for the period 2003-2009 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The following information is however readily available.

- (i) A review of the period 1 April 2004 – 31 March 2010 for all staff in post at 31 March 2010 confirmed that 29 staff had received salary overpayments.
- (ii) The total amount of overpayments for this period has been estimated to be approximately £231,000.
- (iii) The Chairman of the Consumer Council during the period 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2008 was Stephen Costello MBE and the Chairman from 1 January 2009 to date is Rick Hill.

Additional information on overpayments is included in the Consumer Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2009-2010 which is available in the Assembly library.

EU Red Tape for Small Businesses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had in the last twelve months with the European Commission regarding the reduction in EU red tape for small businesses and micro-firms.

(AQW 948/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials maintain regular contact with officials in the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, who in turn take forward discussions with the European Commission regarding the reduction in EU red tape for small and micro businesses. They work to influence and shape the policy stance taken by the Commission for the benefit of all UK businesses.

Fourth Company Law Directive

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations her Department has made in relation to the proposed directive that would exclude certain enterprises from requirements under the 4th Company Law Directive.

(AQW 991/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The European Commission's proposal to exempt micro-entities which meet the criteria from EU accounting Directives is in line with its target to reduce administrative burdens on small businesses. If the Commission's proposal is ratified by the European Parliament, Member States will have a final date by which the Directive must be transposed into legislation. Company law, while a transferred matter, is administered on a United Kingdom-wide basis. As such, legislation to implement any directive will therefore be taken forward by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Fourth Company Law Directive

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimated timescale for the commencement of the proposed directive that would exclude certain enterprises from requirements under the 4th Company Law Directive.

(AQW 992/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Company law, which remains a transferred matter, has been administered on a United Kingdom wide basis since 2006. Legislation for implementing this welcome reduction in the administrative burden on smaller enterprises will therefore be taken forward by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It is not possible to provide a timescale for implementation as the proposals have yet to be ratified by the European Parliament. My officials will liaise with BIS on progress.

Olympic Contracts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any of the 40 local businesses which have secured Olympic contracts valued at over £30 million are based in North Antrim.

(AQW 996/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is aware that some businesses based in the North Antrim constituency have won Olympics-related business. These have included contracts awarded through the Olympic Delivery Authority supply chains and by The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Ltd. (LOCOG)

Northern Ireland based companies have also won Olympic business through their supply chains but it is not possible to know precisely the number involved. It is also encouraging to hear of other success stories by companies in Northern Ireland which can be attributed to the Olympics such as that by Wrightbus to supply redesigned Routemaster buses to Arriva which are required to be in service for London 2012.

Confidentiality restrictions may apply regarding information relating to individual contracts.

Olympic Contracts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what support her Department or its agencies have given to companies bidding for Olympic contracts; and (ii) of the companies that received this support, how many were successful.

(AQW 997/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Olympics contract opportunities are published on CompeteFor, the official 2012 business brokerage website for contracts. To be successful, companies must comply with criteria such as Quality Management, Health and Safety, and Equal Opportunities. Invest NI has undertaken extensive activities with companies to promote 2012 business opportunities and to support them in their efforts to win related contracts.

These activities have included:

- promotion of CompeteFor
 - promotion of LOCOG opportunities
 - awareness and skill development through conferences and information seminars
 - facilitating meetings with Tier One contractors in London and Belfast
 - developing dedicated 2012 Games web pages
 - publishing guides to professional tendering and to using CompeteFor
 - workshops in professional tendering and Quality Management Systems
 - one-to-one consultancy support to selected companies to prepare tender bids.
- (ii) To date, almost 1700 local businesses have registered on CompeteFor; more than 700 companies have attended 2012 events organised by Invest NI with significant numbers receiving advice, guidance and support both at and after the events. Invest NI is aware of around 40 local companies who have:
- won main contracts
 - won supply chain contracts
 - won business through CompeteFor which they might not have been aware of otherwise.

Olympic Contracts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is being provided to companies to help them win any of the remaining Olympic contracts.

(AQW 998/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI, as Northern Ireland's business development agency, has responsibility for helping local companies in their efforts to win Olympics contracts. Invest NI has been promoting and raising awareness of 2012 business opportunities and assisting companies to become better prepared and fit to win contracts by increasing skills, competitiveness, capacity and capability.

- Invest NI continues to offer support to companies by:
- Promoting the CompeteFor website
- Organising events to promote business opportunities
- Distributing opportunity bulletins issued by The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Ltd (LOCOG) directly to relevant companies, business representative organisations and local councils.

- Advising companies on how to strengthen their representations to buyers in key areas such as professional tendering, quality management, health and safety, equal opportunities, website design.
- Facilitating meetings with key buyers in London and Belfast
- Providing one-to-one consultancy support with bid preparation to selected companies
- Negotiating preferential rates for managed offices in London for clients.
- Working with LOCOG.

The latest 2012 business event took place on 2nd June 2011. Invest NI organised a conference at which Charles Allen, Chair of LOCOG's Nations and Regions Group, updated local companies on the remaining opportunities open to them through LOCOG. Invest NI Business Advisers from a range of relevant subject areas were also on hand for one-to-one meetings with attendees.

Corporation Tax

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her Department's assessment of the additional number of jobs that might be created as a result of lower corporation tax.

(AQW 1000/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Economic Advisory Group (EAG) recently undertook analysis to assess the impact of a lower rate of corporation tax on the Northern Ireland economy.

The research indicates that if corporation tax was reduced to 12.5% by 2014 then employment would be anticipated to increase substantially - 58,000 higher by 2030 or around 4,500 additional jobs per year in the longer-term, peaking at over 5,800 per annum by 2030.

Invest NI

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of jobs created in each District Council area from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011; (ii) how many of these jobs were as a result of (a) foreign direct investment; and (b) local investors; and (iii) what resources were allocated by Invest NI to each District Council area in the 2010/11 financial year for (a) job creation; (b) land acquisition; and (c) property development.

(AQW 1011/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Table 1 below shows (i) the number of jobs expected to be created, which are described as 'Jobs Promoted', by (ii) (a) foreign direct investors; and (b) indigenous investors that had an offer of assistance approved by Invest NI between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011, broken down by District Council area. The table also details (iii) the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI to support (a) job creation in these projects.

However, it should be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as District Councils. Assistance patterns are demand-led by those businesses which have come forward with projects suitable for Invest NI assistance.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI EMPLOYMENT RELATED ACTIVITY BY OWNERSHIP & DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA (2010-11)

DCA	FDI			Local			Total		
	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m
Antrim	130		1.86	526	7	4.02	656	7	5.87
Ards	4	11	0.09	18		0.16	22	11	0.25
Armagh				40	3	0.17	40	3	0.17
Ballymena				50	1,237	5.40	50	1,237	5.40
Ballymoney				43		0.12	43		0.12
Banbridge				12		0.09	12		0.09
Belfast	1,430	30	16.01	194	56	1.76	1,624	86	17.77
Carrickfergus	196		3.84	7		0.06	203		3.90
Castlereagh	1		0.02	77	6	0.39	78	6	0.41
Coleraine	2	2	0.06	29		0.20	31	2	0.26
Cookstown				65	5	0.44	65	5	0.44
Craigavon	37		0.26	79	32	0.91	116	32	1.17
Derry	297		1.26	73		0.44	370		1.70
Down				59		0.24	59		0.24
Dungannon	1		0.03	163		1.04	164		1.08
Fermanagh	1		0.02	63	6	0.30	64	6	0.33
Larne	1		0.01	18		0.09	19		0.10
Limavady				27		0.19	27		0.19

DCA	FDI			Local			Total		
	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m	New Jobs	Safeguarded Jobs	Total Assistance £m
Lisburn	131		3.19	136	3	0.72	267	3	3.90
Magherafelt	1		0.09	81		0.62	82		0.71
Moyle				14		0.11	14		0.11
Newry & Mourne	4		0.03	633	4	5.87	637	4	5.90
Newtownabbey				36		0.23	36		0.23
North Down				22	5	0.26	22	5	0.26
Omagh	35		0.12	26		0.18	61		0.30
Strabane				9		0.09	9		0.09
Not Yet Located	545		6.27				545		6.27
Total	2,816	43	33.16	2,496	1,364	24.11	5,312	1,407	57.26

Notes

- 1 As there are part time jobs that are rounded in each individual DCA, the table totals may not add exactly.
- 2 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI supported over 1,800 new jobs indirectly through the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start a Business programme), delivered in conjunction with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Table 2 below shows the associated breakdown by District Council Area.

TABLE 2: JOBS PROMOTED THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME BY DCA (2010-11)

DCA	Jobs Promoted
Antrim	42
Ards	56
Armagh	60
Ballymena	35
Ballymoney	25
Banbridge	48
Belfast	281
Carrickfergus	18
Castlereagh	59
Coleraine	72
Cookstown	69
Craigavon	72
Derry	86
Down	64
Dungannon	102
Fermanagh	77
Larne	35
Limavady	57
Lisburn	98
Magherafelt	69
Moyle	18
Newry & Mourne	96
Newtownabbey	79
North Down	64
Omagh	85
Strabane	44
Not Yet Located	7
Total	1,815

During the 2010-11 financial year no resources were allocated by Invest NI to (iii) (b) land acquisition; however, £2.3m was spent on (c) property development. Table 3 shows the split, by District Council Area, of the £2.3m spent on land and property development in the period

TABLE 3: INVEST NI SPEND ON LAND & PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT (2010-11)

District Council Area	Total Spend (£'000)
Antrim	460
Ards	8
Armagh	322
Belfast	159
Carrickfergus	175
Coleraine	100
Cookstown	1
Craigavon	408
Dungannon	426
Fermanagh	9
Lisburn	99
Newtownabbey	114
North Down	9
Omagh	14

Businesses Trading Online

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of businesses currently trade on-line.

(AQW 1032/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Recent figures for the UK show that 14.9% of businesses sold over a website in 2009, generating sales worth over £115bn to the UK economy. The UK performs relatively well compared to Europe, where 11% of business received online orders in 2009. Unfortunately, equivalent statistics are not available at a regional level within the UK.

In the UK just over three quarters of firms had a website, compared to an EU average of 64%. Across the UK, large businesses have adopted information technology to the greatest extent, and virtually all of them have a website. However, SMEs have also been taking up technology, with 72% of small and 92% of medium businesses having a website in 2009.

All businesses across Northern Ireland have the ability to sell online, as broadband services of at least 512kbps have been available to every business since December 2005. In addition, through my Department's Next Generation Broadband Project, 85% of businesses are also able to access higher speed broadband services. This provides the capacity for NI firms to reach new markets and increase sales by developing an online trading presence.

My Department also helps local firms through the free logonni programme, offering impartial advice to SMEs on the benefits of broadband to business. Since its launch two years ago 3,200 firms have participated, with an increase of 13% in their e-business activity. Invest NI also provides a range of support to assist local businesses, with a network of ICT/eBusiness Advisors providing support through Invest NI's regional offices throughout Northern Ireland.

Foreign Direct Investment Jobs

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of the Foreign Direct Investment jobs that were created during the last Assembly mandate were located outside the greater Belfast area.

(AQO 179/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is the agency through which the Department of Enterprise Trade & Investment (DETI) provides funding to increase business productivity, the means by which wealth can be created for the benefit of the whole community. It does this by supporting projects that aim to create jobs, an aspect of the agency's work that is becoming increasingly important given the need to increase employment levels following the impact of the downturn. In addition, Invest NI supports projects that promote innovation and capability development that, although not directly related to job creation, will eventually lead to employment opportunities.

During the last Assembly mandate (8th May 2007 to 24th March 2011) Invest NI provided assistance in support of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects which expect to create 9,666 new jobs and safeguard 2,793 existing jobs. The percentage of these jobs outside the 4 Belfast Parliamentary Constituency Areas was 53% (5,100) for new jobs and 22% (612) for safeguarded jobs.

However, it should be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as Parliamentary Constituencies. Assistance patterns are demand-led by those businesses which have come forward with projects suitable for Invest NI assistance.

Availability of Wi-Fi

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of (i) the availability of Wi-Fi in hotels, restaurants and cafés compared to other countries; and (ii) the benefits of increasing the availability of Wi-Fi for the economy and in particular the hospitality sector.

(AQW 1039/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Comprehensive information on the number of hotels, restaurants and cafes with Wi-Fi access is not available. However, of the 140 hotels certified by NITB, 52 have Wi-Fi access and this contributes to the quality of the visitor experience and improves the quality of customer service and communication. DETI supported a trial of Wi-fi nodes in Ballycastle, Newcastle, Enniskillen and Antrim and all of these services have continued after the trial ended apart from Antrim. Wi-fi is just one type of mobile broadband service and mobile services is one of the themes on which views have been sought by the recently published draft Telecommunications Action Plan for the period 2011- 2015.

Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme for Farmers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what consideration her Department is giving to the provision of a renewable heat incentive scheme for farmers, (ii) what form this scheme might take; and (iii) when she expects a decision on the delivery of such a scheme to be made.

(AQW 1056/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently finalising proposals on the introduction of a Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). This follows on from a commitment I made in September 2010 that my Department would seek to introduce a RHI in Northern Ireland, providing it was economically viable to so.

My Department has recently concluded an economic appraisal of a RHI for Northern Ireland and I plan to shortly launch a public consultation on the preferred method of incentivisation for the Northern Ireland renewable heat market.

The proposed scheme will include measures to support the deployment of renewable heat in all sectors, including farming, in Northern Ireland.

AA Four-Star-Rated Guest Houses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current number of AA four star rated guest houses.

(AQW 1070/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not record the number of AA rated properties in Northern Ireland.

Under the existing NITB star rating scheme there are 15 four star rated guest houses in Northern Ireland.

United States Open Golf Championships

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the successes of Graham McDowell and Rory McIlroy at the United States Open Golf Championships, what steps she will take to ensure that golfing tourism at Royal Portrush Golf Club and other venues is promoted internationally.

(AQW 1071/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The current success of our Northern Ireland golfers, Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell, has raised the profile of Northern Ireland as a golf destination within the international marketplace.

In recent days, Tourism Ireland has stepped up its promotional programme to maximise the benefits for Northern Ireland from Rory McIlroy's historic victory in the US Open and also the announcement of North & West Coast Links as 'European Golf Destination of the Year', and indeed Graeme McDowell's success last year. Tourism Ireland is building on what was an already busy golf promotional programme for 2011, and further campaigns will be rolled out in the coming weeks.

My officials are also discussing with Royal Portrush the feasibility of Northern Ireland hosting the Irish Open.

Air Passenger Duty

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what formal written response she made to the consultation on Air Passenger Duty which ended on 17 June 2011.

(AQW 1097/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) led on the Northern Ireland response to the HM Treasury consultation on the reform of Air Passenger Duty (APD) as APD is a taxation issue.

My Department provided written input to DFP which was used to inform the DFP response to the consultation.

International Sales Conference

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the benefits to the North Coast area of the international sales conference held in the Flowerfield Arts Centre, Portstewart in March 2011.

(AQW 1112/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland attended a stakeholder event at the Flowerfield Arts Centre on 30 March 2011 as part of its annual sales conference. The International and Overseas Sales Teams, along with Invest NI's Chief Executive, Alastair Hamilton, were joined by members of Coleraine Borough Council's Economic Development team and local businesses to discuss the Coleraine inward investment proposition and how best to work together to promote economic growth.

The primary aim of the event was to outline the Coleraine proposition to the overseas sales teams. This was a successful event and the overseas teams were able to see first hand the initiatives that the Council has undertaken, including Digital Causeway Ireland.

The conference is just one of the ways that Invest NI works with local stakeholders to encourage the development of regional propositions which can help ensure that the offering for their area is maximised to attract visits and investment by potential investors.

Results in terms of investment as a direct result of the conference may take some time to come to fruition. Securing an inward investment project is the end point of an extensive process which may span a considerable period, often 18 to 24 months or even longer.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in West Tyrone

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support is available through the Omagh Enterprise Company and the Strabane Enterprise Agency to small and medium-sized enterprises in West Tyrone.

(AQW 1130/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) and Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) are delivered by Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI) through the Local Enterprise Agencies across Northern Ireland, including Omagh Enterprise Company and Strabane Enterprise Agency.

EDP is targeted at early stage entrepreneurs and start up businesses. It offers individuals a bespoke package of training and support to improve business capability. Participants are given advice on finance, marketing, sales and other fundamentals and are helped to develop a Business Plan for their new business.

Since April 2009, 315 individuals have completed a start up business plan through EDP at Omagh Enterprise Company and 143 at Strabane Enterprise Agency.

SEP focuses on supporting new social economy businesses with the potential to grow, helping them to build the skills and capabilities to make an impact on the local economy. The programme offers support at both the business idea and business planning stage. Omagh Enterprise Company delivers SEP in the West Tyrone Constituency (including Strabane).

Since 2009 in West Tyrone 28 social groups have participated on SEP with 10 of these becoming established businesses covering a range of sectors such as a community theatre, tour bus company, information technology and childcare provision.

Ballycastle Coalfields Area of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment her Department has made of the tourism potential of the Ballycastle Coalfields Area of Special Scientific Interest and its potential links to the Atlantic Salt Trail Project.

(AQW 1133/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has just recently been made aware of the European Ecosal Atlantis Project and understands that Carrickmore Road, Ballycastle is a potential site in terms of developing an Atlantic Salt Route trail. Therefore in light of available detailed project information no assessment has yet been made.

The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) within my department having been approached a number of years ago on the Ballycastle saltmines initiative are willing to assist the project if required, as the department has a statutory responsibility for abandoned/disused mines.

NITB understands that the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT), with a responsibility for sustainable tourism in the Causeway Coast and Glen's region, has also been approached regarding this Ecosal Atlantis Project. CCGHT, with assistance from NITB is currently developing a heritage trails project in the region however they hope to engage with the project promoter of the Saltmines Project with input from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Solar Energy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans there are to enable people using solar energy to sell any excess to the Grid.

(AQW 1214/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Excess electricity generated by solar photovoltaic panels can currently be sold to the grid through an NIE Energy generation tariff.

This export tariff offers 5.49p/kWh for generators up to 100kW and a variable tariff for those above this size.

Department of the Environment

Planning Application P/2009/0357

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to planning application P/2009/0357 for lands adjacent to 51 Burren Road (i) whether he is aware (a) of residents' concerns; (b) that Roads Service determined 16 September 2010 that the road was not safe for pedestrians; (c) that Planning Service did not consider the proposal of Newry and Mourne District Council to refer the application to the Management Review Board; (ii) for his assessment of the planning application; and (iii) whether he intends to review Planning Service's decision of 24 March 2011 in relation to the application.

(AQW 309/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I have been fully briefed on the detail of this planning application for a total of 49 residential units at Burren Road, Warrenpoint. I am therefore aware that local residents raised a number of areas of concern throughout the processing of the planning application which included the social housing element of the scheme, issues around the social housing allocation in the draft area plan, the details of the proposed layout and design of dwellings and road safety issues.

All the grounds for objection were fully considered by the Department and access and road safety matters were the subject of extensive consultation with DRD Roads Service. I am informed Roads Service has confirmed on a number of occasions that they are content with the final internal layout, access position and works on the public road.

The Councils request to have the proposal reassessed by the Management Board was considered. In terms of the criteria against which such requests are judged the Department did not consider the proposal represented an application which merited reassessment by the Board. It was noted that the proposal is for 49 units and this site is a portion of a larger area of land zoned for housing within the Draft Banbridge/Newry & Mourne Area Plan 2015. This was one factor which led to the decision in relation to the Management Board.

The Department has advised that it followed the correct procedures through its assessment and that key policies have been properly applied; that the application was considered at length during both initial stages of assessment and through the deferred process; that the concerns and points of objection raised by local residents have been fully considered and that the final determination of the application followed extensive consultation with DRD Roads Service in particular.

Full planning permission was granted on 24 March 2011. I am satisfied that there are not grounds for a review of the decision.

Planning Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Planning Service has any plans to improve its neighbourhood notification system.

(AQW 693/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Currently the Neighbour Notification scheme is not a statutory requirement, but has become established practice and custom.

Improvements to the Neighbour Notification system were raised during consideration of the Planning Bill. This is an issue that I am prepared to think about further, including the issue of statutory authority.

High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale for implementation of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 728/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Assembly amended the High Hedges Bill to require the Department to introduce subordinate legislation to limit the maximum level of fee a complainant should pay and to allow for the transfer of the fee to the hedge owner.

Both the primary and subordinate legislation are required to provide the full operational regime so the primary cannot be commenced until the subordinate legislation is ready.

As some of the proposed subordinate legislation has not been consulted on a public consultation will be required and both sets of Regulations will need to pass through the Assembly processes.

I am currently considering a timetable for delivery and I can confirm my commitment to bringing the legislation forward at the earliest opportunity. I will attempt to fast forward the implementation of the legislation.

MOT Test Centres

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the vehicle pass rates at each MOT centre in each of the last five years.

(AQW 733/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The details requested are tabulated below. For the purposes of this response, the pass rate is taken to mean the percentage of private cars that passed full tests in each of the years in question.

Test Centre	Pass Rate (%)				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Armagh	76.78	77.85	78.65	76.33	77.08
Ballymena	77.82	79.11	80.04	78.90	78.99
Belfast	79.77	80.93	82.64	81.33	81.81
Coleraine	79.23	78.92	80.01	79.32	79.43
Cookstown	72.11	73.87	77.31	77.92	76.71
Craigavon	72.66	71.15	75.15	76.39	75.86
Downpatrick	77.63	79.51	81.57	79.52	79.54
Enniskillen	77.68	76.97	78.51	78.42	77.20
Larne	82.45	79.31	78.64	76.38	77.37
Lisburn	79.53	81.66	82.10	82.19	81.82
Londonderry	75.39	75.93	76.99	75.27	75.37
Mallusk	74.74	76.87	78.27	76.72	76.54

Test Centre	Pass Rate (%)				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Newry	79.05	80.71	81.12	80.69	78.41
Newtownards	74.91	74.93	75.09	77.96	79.61
Omagh	76.60	77.18	77.66	77.07	77.22

Capital Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's capital programme for the next three years.

(AQW 779/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below outlines my Department's capital programme for the next three years (2012-15).

Capital Investment Programme	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15
Strategic Waste Infrastructure Fund	0.7	0.5	0.2
Rethink Waste Fund	2.2	2.4	2.7
Roe Valley Hydro Electric Scheme	0.5		
NI Driver Licensing System	0.9		2.7
Business Critical	1.6	1.1	2.0
Total	5.9	4.0	7.6

I will actively look at my Department's Budget, attempt to release additional monies, reduce the size of the civil service where appropriate and justified and attempt to release monies for other purposes.

New Council Boundaries

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider amending the current proposals for new council boundaries under the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 788/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will be considering the recommendations made by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in his report of June 2009 and I hope to present a paper on the reduction of council numbers and the boundaries of the new local government districts for the Executive's consideration sooner rather than later.

University Road Methodist Church, Belfast

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has for the University Road Methodist Church, Belfast.

(AQW 802/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has no plans for this building. The future use of a listed building is a matter for the owner.

Planning approval, and listed building consent, for a scheme to convert the building into 26 apartments issued in 2008. This permission will expire in 2012, if no works are undertaken before then.

Ballyholme Beach, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what monitoring measures will be put in place at Ballyholme Beach, Bangor while the interim sewerage works to ensure compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive are being carried out.

(AQW 806/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

Ballyholme Bathing Water

Monitoring is being carried out at Ballyholme bathing water, the new North Down/Ards Waste Water Treatment Works (WTTW) and at sewage pumping stations in the vicinity.

The Sewerage infrastructure in the Ballyholme area has been significantly upgraded in conjunction with the recently commissioned North Down/Ards WTTW with both designed to deliver the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWTTD) and Bathing Waters Directive (BWD).

Water quality at Ballyholme beach is measured 20 times during the bathing season, between 1 June and mid-September each year, following a pre-determined sampling programme. The water is tested for several bacterial indicators and is inspected for any visual signs of pollution. Observation is made of the general area for signs of pollution. The results of monitoring are published weekly on the NIEA web site and issued to North Down Borough Council for publication locally.

If a bathing water sample fails one of the Directive's mandatory bacterial standards NIEA will immediately initiate a pollution investigation in order to identify and resolve the issue. Similarly, any visual indicators of pollution are followed up as pollution investigations.

Following any failure of the Directive's mandatory standards, the bathing water is re-sampled daily until NIEA is assured a satisfactory standard is restored.

North Down/Ards WTTW

NIEA has set the Water Order Consent conditions to ensure that the discharge from the North Down/Ards WTTW meets the requirements of the UWTTD and thus protect the Bathing Water in Ballyholme. This works is operated under a Public Private Partnership scheme (PPP) by Veolia Water. Samples of the treated effluent are collected by Veolia against a sampling programme which is agreed in advance with NIEA. The Agency routinely assesses compliance and audits the laboratory results annually.

The sampling programme, which continues all year, measures its compliance with bacteriological parameters during the bathing season. North Down/Ards WTTW has been compliant with both its Water Order Consent conditions and the requirements of the UWTTD since its completion in 2008.

Luke's Point Pumping Station

The upgrade of the sewerage network in the Ballyholme area is nearing completion, with the exception of the provision of adequate storm storage at Luke's Point Pumping Station. This is planned for completion in the current investment period. Luke's Point pumping station has had an interim upgrade which provides storage to significantly reduce the number of spills, but not to the required 3 spills per bathing season limit. Until the final upgrade is in place Northern Ireland Water (NIW) will supply information on spills during the bathing season from this asset.

The Water Order Consent conditions for Luke's Point include the requirement for a telemetry alarm system to be in place. This allows NIW to remotely monitor the operation of the pumping station so that they can quickly respond in the event of a failure.

I have convened a Good Beach Summit on 29 June 2011 to identify what further measures may be feasible to improve beach and water standards.

Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's level of commitment to the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government.

(AQW 808/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A key aspect of local government's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Programme is to release the required upfront savings to deliver improved services and drive positive reform before reorganisation. My Department will therefore continue to work in partnership with the local government sector to ensure that the ICE programme and the local government reform agenda support each other and are fully aligned.

I await the ICE report and will shortly meet SOLACE and NILGA. I believe that savings can be made – indeed are being realised – where council clusters can use and use their great size and expertise to reduce saving without detriment to the ratepayer. I am keen to see further and immediate progression on this.

Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to progress and implement the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme for Local Government and what timescales are envisaged.

(AQW 813/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I understand a copy of local government's final Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) outturn report will be available after 24 June 2011. As soon as I have considered and discussed its findings with NILGA and SOLACE representatives I should be able to form an opinion on the ICE programme and consider plans and timescales for implementation.

In going forward, however, I believe there is an early opportunity to exploit the savings and efficiencies that exist. I will be adopting this approach in my discussions with the sector.

Planning Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to introduce third party appeals on planning applications.

(AQW 868/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will consider the arguments for and against third party appeals before deciding whether or not to introduce them. This is currently being assessed.

Breaches of Conservation Areas

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many breaches of conservation areas have been reported and investigated by the Planning Service in each of the last five years; and what action has been taken in each case.

(AQW 870/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Prior to the 1 April 2009, full electronic records for enforcement were not retained. However, information extracted from the Departments ICT system for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 business years in respect of breaches of planning control relating to Demolition within Conservation Areas and Trees within Conservation Areas is set out in the table below.

Business Year	2009/10	2010/11
Demolition in Conservation Area	8	6
Trees in Conservation Area	5	8
Total	13	14

Of the 13 cases in 2009/10,

- 9 were investigated and found that no breach had occurred;
- 2 cases were considered not expedient to proceed with formal enforcement action;
- 1 case was remedied/resolved; and,
- 1 case was granted consent to demolish the building.

Of the 14 cases in 2010/11,

- 5 were investigated and found that no breach of planning control had occurred;
- 2 cases were considered not expedient to proceed with formal enforcement action;
- 1 case was granted listed building consent; and,
- 6 cases remain under investigation.

I have requested an update on all current live investigations.

Planning Service

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications that were received by Planning Service in the last year remained unprocessed for more than six months.

(AQW 871/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department was in receipt of 17,491 valid planning applications in the 2010 calendar year. 14,480 of these applications have either had a decision issued or withdrawn to date and 2,926 of these completed applications took more than six months to process.

Work continues to reduce the backlog of applications with priority focusing on major applications in the planning system for more than 12 months. Targets during 2010/11 have largely been achieved as part of an agreed action plan across the local area office network with a 50% reduction in applications over 12 months in the system during 2010/11. The action plan is being updated and progressed during 2011/12 with a view to further reducing the backlog.

However I have confirmed to the assembly that target times have been suffering in recent months. This issue and indeed creating more challenging time limits going forward are issues that I am now considering.

Land Disposal Requests from Councils

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of land disposal requests from councils that he has approved since taking up office, including the name of the council; (ii) the name of the organisation receiving the council asset; (iii) the value of the land; and (iv) the amount paid for the land, broken down by (a) local council area; and (b) each request.

(AQW 875/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since taking up office as Minister of the Department of the Environment, I have approved the disposal of council land in one case and the lease of council land in a further four cases. Information relating to each of these cases is set out in the table below;

Council Name	Organisation Receiving Council Asset	Disposal / Lease	Value/ Rental value of the Land	Amount/ Rental Paid for the Land	Monetary Conditions
Newry & Mourne District Council	Thomas Davis Gaelic Football Club	Disposal	£370,000	£370,000	Disposal (sale) subject to the organisation paying outstanding council loan charges of £60,000 and all legal costs.
Newry & Mourne District Council	Cullyhanna Community Partnership	Lease (25 years)	£2,500 per annum (for first 3 years)	£2,500 per annum (for first 3 years)	Rental figure reflects refurbishment cost to the organisation of £176,250.
Newry & Mourne District Council	Lower Mourne Gaelic League	Lease (25 years)	£2,500 per annum (for first 3 years)	£2,500 per annum (for first 3 years)	Rental figure reflects the organisations refurbishment costs of the vacant property to make it suitable for use.
Omagh District Council	Éire Óg Hurling & Camogie Club	Lease (99 years with 5 yearly reviews)	£300 per annum	£300 per annum	Rental figure reflects refurbishment cost to the organisation to make it suitable for use.
Castlereagh Borough Council	Dundonald Bowling Club	Lease (5 years)	£5,750 per annum	Nil	The concessionary rent reflects the council's contribution in kind to the organisation to further develop the facility.

Listed Buildings

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how many listed buildings have been damaged or destroyed as a result of fire in each of the last five years.

(AQW 883/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below gives information on the number of listed buildings damaged or destroyed as the result of fire in each of the last five years. I have also included figures for the year to date.

06/07	1
07/08	2
08/09	3
09/10	2
10/11	1
11/12 (* incomplete for current year)	8
Total	17

In regard to this year, you should note that three of the listed buildings recorded are (now) part of a single hostel which suffered one fire.

It should also be noted that currently there is no requirement for owners to advise the Department of any damage to their buildings, thus, usually only major or noteworthy incidences are brought to our attention and only these can be included in our figures. I have asked for further details on the 11-12 incidents and on the principle of a general reporting requirement on owners.

Climate Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has considered introducing a Climate Bill. (AQW 936/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim on 14 June 2011 to AQO 103/11-15.

Written Answers Booklet for 17 June 2011 <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/qanda/2011mandate/writtenans/2011/110617.htm#7>

Planning Application C/2011/0131/F

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the status of planning application C/2011/0131/F, including when a decision will be made. (AQW 1092/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The application in question is for an anaerobic digestion plant in association with Ballyrashane creamy. All consultees have now replied bar one. On the advice of the Land and Resource Management (LRM) team at NIEA, the Department consulted with the Health and Safety Executive NI (HSENI) because the applicant referred to complying with the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 (DSEAR) within their application submission. A reply is expected shortly. Officials are assessing the application, including consultee responses and an objection and aims to consult Coleraine Borough Council at its next meeting on 26 July 2011.

I am aware of this application and that the report may have contributed to the delay in its processing. I have met with Senior Planning Management to identify findings and to put in place further process to reduce the risk of delays in other cases, particularly those with economic impact.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the pay increases or bonus payments Special Advisers have received since May 2007; and (ii) whether their pay is linked to Senior Civil Service pay grades, and if so, whether they are subject to any pay or bonus restrictions applicable to those grades. (AQW 480/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Annual pay award increases for Special Advisers in all Departments since May 2007 were made within the value advised by DFP, namely 2.5% with effect from 1 April 2008 and 3.5% with effect from 1 April 2009. No pay awards have been paid in 2010 or 2011. Within this time period one Special Adviser received an increase of 6.4% with effect from 1 December 2008 on review of the post in line with the provision in Section 8 of Schedule 3 of the Arrangements for the Appointment, Terms and Conditions and Remuneration of Special Advisers.

There were no bonus payments made to any Special Advisers since May 2007.

Special Advisers' pay is linked to Senior Civil Service pay in that Section 7 of Schedule 3 of the Arrangements for the Appointment, Terms and Conditions and Remuneration of Special Advisers, May

2007, states that: “pay bands will be revalorised in line with movement to the appropriate reference points on the Senior Civil Service pay bands.” In addition, Section 8 of the Schedule states: “Annual pay progression will be based on the average Senior Civil Service salary increase”. This link was not maintained in 2009 when the maximum of Special Advisers’ pay bands increased by 3.5% while Senior Civil Service pay bands remained frozen. Special Advisers are not entitled to bonus payments under current pay arrangements and Special Advisers’ pay has been frozen in respect of the years commencing April 2010 and April 2011 in line with arrangements for Senior Civil Service pay.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 594/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The amount spent by DFP on renting storage space in each of the last three years is as follows:

08/09	£ 318,483
09/10	£ 332,152
10/11	£ 355,353

These costs have increased as storage has been moved out of prime office space over the period, however, the increase is more than offset by savings in rent/rates of the office accommodation.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 477/11-15, how many contracts have been awarded through single tender actions (i) with advance approval of the Accounting Officer; and (ii) without advance approval of the Accounting Officer, since May 2007; and what steps have been taken to prevent such breaches of procurement rules.

(AQW 881/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The requirement to secure Accounting Officer approval for all single tender actions was formalised in June 2010 with the issue of Procurement Guidance Note 03/10 by Central Procurement Directorate.

My Department has issued this guidance, together with procedures for seeking Accounting Officer approval, to Departmental Board members and staff. The guidance is also included in the Department's Governance and Control Framework which is available to all staff on the departmental intranet site.

Going forward, all single tender actions will be reported to and monitored by the Departmental Board on a quarterly basis, with updates also provided to the Departmental Audit and Risk Committee.

Information on the single tender actions by the Department in 2010-11 is provided below. Information for prior years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Single Tenders	Number in 2010-11
With Advance Accounting Officer approval	12
Without Advance Accounting Officer approval	5

Civil Service Grade 3 Posts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what vacancies currently exist for Civil Service Grade 3 posts; and what plans there are to fill these vacancies.

(AQW 891/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is set out in the attached table.

CURRENT NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE VACANT GRADE 3 POSTS AS AT 16 JUNE 2011 AND DETAILS OF PLANS TO FILL

Department	Total Number of Vacancies	Post Title	Plans to Fill
DE	1	Deputy Secretary, Schools and Youth Policy	No plans to fill this post.
DHSSPS	3	Senior Finance & Personnel Director	External recruitment. Successful candidate to take up post on 1 July 2011.
		Deputy Secretary (Social Services)	External recruitment competition under way.
		Deputy Secretary (Healthcare Policy)	Internal promotion competition under way.
OFMDFM	1	Director of Equality and Strategy	Internal promotion competition under way.

Notes: Figures relate to permanent current vacancies in the 13 Northern Ireland Departments and their Agencies

Civil Service Grade 2 and Grade 3 Posts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current salary scales for (i) Grade 2; and (ii) Grade 3 posts in the Civil Service; and what bonuses have been paid to (a) Grade 2; and (b) Grade 3 staff in each of the last three years.

(AQW 892/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current salary scales for (i) Grade 2 and (ii) Grade 3 posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service are as follows:

	Minimum	Maximum
(i) Grade 2	£98,059	£205,000
(ii) Grade 3	£81,600	£160,000

Performance period	Eligibility Date	Total of Grade 2 Bonuses	Total of Grade 3 Bonuses
1/4/08 – 31/3/09	1 April 2009	Nil	Nil
1/4/09 – 31/3/10	1 April 2010	Nil	Nil
1/4/10 – 31/3/11	1 April 2011	Nil	Nil

Civil Service Grade 3 Posts

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what vacancies currently exist in Departments for Civil Service Grade 3 posts or equivalent levels within agencies or arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 922/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information in relation to Civil Service Grade 3 vacancies which currently exist in NICS Departments and their Agencies is set out in the response to AQW 891/11-15.

In addition, the Department of Education has 2 vacancies at Grade 3 equivalent level in its Arms Length Bodies.

Inland Waterways

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel on what legal basis do bodies such as The Honourable Irish Society and the Duke of Abercorn Estates Limited claim exclusive private ownership of some river beds and fishing rights on inland waterways.

(AQW 966/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not have responsibility for either of the entities mentioned, which are not public bodies. Almost certainly information in relation to such ownership and rights will be contained in the documents of title of both entities, but these are not held by Land & Property Services.

Co-operation from a Republic of Ireland Government Department

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 990/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP serves as sponsor department for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the Managing Authority for the cross border PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes. DFP exercises its sponsor department role in partnership with the Republic of Ireland's Department of Finance (DOF).

The PEACE III Programme, which aims to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation, has a budget of approximately £300 million. Its eligible area comprises Northern Ireland and the six border counties of the Republic of Ireland.

INTERREG IVA is a tripartite Programme with a value of approximately £235 million. Its eligible area comprises Northern Ireland, the six Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland, and Western Scotland. The Programme aims to support strategic cross border co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable region. All projects assisted, including those that involve Scotland, must have a significant north/south dimension.

DFP is the accountable Northern Ireland Department for the Public Sector Collaboration Theme of the INTERREG IVA Programme. DOF is the corresponding accountable department in the Republic. The Theme has a budget of approximately £22 million. All of the Public Sector Collaboration projects approved to date have been formally approved by DFP and DOF in their role as accountable departments. These projects are listed below.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Value*
Donegal County Council	Women into Public Life	£817,223
Centre for Cross Border Studies	The Ireland/Northern Ireland Cross-Border Co-operation Observatory	£1,441,098.00
DHSSPS	Driving Change	£1,257,421
RNIB Northern Ireland	Sensory Engagement Project	£1,866,037
The Cedar Foundation	ConneXions	£469,943
Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd	Small Ferries Strategic Plan	£235,000

Lead Partner	Project Name	Value*
The Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)	Deaf Communications Infrastructure Development	£962,080
East Border Region	Management and Implementation	£899,656
ICBAN	Management and Implementation	£400,161
North West Region Cross Border Group	Management and Implementation	£784,804
COMET	Management and Implementation	£414,922
North East Partnership	Management and Implementation	£531,688
East Border Region	Action for Biodiversity	£815,455
ICBAN	Central Border Region Spatial Planning Initiative	£1,456,995
East Border Region	Energy Efficiency and Micro Generation Project	£778,814
East Border Region	Promoting Balanced and Sustainable Cross-Border Development	£700,000
North West Region Cross Border Group	Urban and Village Renewal Programme	£904,545
North West Region Cross-Border Group	SPACEial	£470,942
NEP Business Improvement Districts	NEP Business Improvement Districts	£716,000

* Where required an exchange rate of £1=€1.1 has been used.

DFP and DOF are also jointly accountable for the Technical Assistance budgets for both PEACE III (£16 million) and INTERREG IVA £14 million). Technical Assistance funds general programme administration, management and monitoring.

Accountability for the other PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Themes, and their respective budgets, is exercised by the relevant departments, north and south, based on policy competence.

- (ii) The PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes have not fully committed their allocation of funding. DFP will continue to work closely with the SEUPB, with DOF in the Republic, and with accountable departments in the two jurisdictions to ensure that both Programme budgets are fully expended and all Programme targets achieved.

The current PEACE and INTERREG Programmes will end in December 2013. DFP is currently working closely with DOF, SEUPB and the European Commission to identify the scope for a further round of EU cross border funding, post 2013. These discussions—on future PEACE and INTERREG Cross Border funding—remain at an early stage.

Corporation Tax

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the annual amount paid in Corporation Tax.

(AQW 1054/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government's consultation paper on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy estimates the value of corporation tax receipts in Northern Ireland in 2009-10 at around £465 million.

This is based on an analysis of the net tax liabilities of companies with a Northern Ireland postcode over a number of financial years. Northern Ireland corporation tax receipts excluding North Sea oil and gas and also branches of UK firms based in Northern Ireland broadly averaged 1.5 per cent of total UK corporation tax receipts between 2002-03 and 2007-08.

Consequently the Government took the view that 1.5 per cent was an appropriate steady state proportion to assume for Northern Ireland receipts and the main costings outlined in the consultation document are estimated on this basis.

However, illustrative costings based on a 1.25 per cent share of receipts have also been included in the document. This reflects the possibility that Northern Ireland tax receipts could remain low in the current economic climate given that the Northern Ireland share of total UK receipts fell to 1.1 per cent in 2008-09.

Corporation Tax

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had, or intends to have, with the Office for Budget Responsibility regarding the rate of Corporation Tax and the implications for the block grant.

(AQW 1068/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have not had, nor do I have any immediate intention of having direct discussions with the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). The OBR is responsible for certifying assumptions and methodologies used by the Treasury in costing Budget measures. It does not have a role in either setting the rate of corporation tax or calculating the block grant.

Treasury used methodologies approved by the OBR to estimate the cost of reducing corporation tax, including profit shifting and tax motivated incorporation and these subsequently informed estimates within the consultation document. There is clearly much work to be done in clarifying and refining these cost estimates and I and my officials will continue to engage directly with the Treasury in this regard.

Air Passenger Duty

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what responses were made to the Treasury's consultation on Air Passenger Duty; and whether he will place the responses in the Assembly library.

(AQW 1098/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I, as the Minister responsible for liaising with the Treasury, responded to the Treasury's consultation on Air Passenger Duty on 17 June. This response has been placed in the Assembly library and is also available on my department's website.

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/dfp-response-to-apd-consultation.pdf>

Department Staff

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 481/11-15, to detail the number of staff in each Department who are from a (i) Catholic background; and (ii) not-determined background, broken down by grade.

(AQW 1099/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide all the data requested as to do so would risk revealing the community background of individuals, which is an offence under both the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. The attached tables provide as much information as it is possible to reveal.

In order to protect the community background of individuals, cell sizes less than 10 have not been released. This has also necessitated the suppression of data in other cells in order to prevent the disclosure of protected data in a neighbouring cell.

NICS CATHOLIC & NOT DETERMINED PERMANENT STAFF BY DEPARTMENT BROKEN DOWN BY ANALOGOUS GRADE @ 1ST JAN 2011

DEPARTMENT: DARD

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	110	32	142
	DP	#	*	104
	S0	193	20	213
	EOI/EOII	416	26	442
	AO	#	*	249
	AA	#	*	143
	Industrial	224	19	243
	All	1428	108	1536

DEPARTMENT: DCAL

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	#	*	14
	DP	#	*	22
	S0	#	*	27
	EOI/EOII	#	*	39
	AO/AA	#	*	38
	Industrial	*	*	10
	Group Total	135	15	150

DEPARTMENT: DE

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	#	*	61
	DP	#	*	26
	SO	#	*	28
	EOI/EOII	#	*	61
	AO	#	*	56
	AA	*	*	11
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	224	19	243

DEPARTMENT: DETI

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	#	*	20
	DP	#	*	37
	SO	#	*	47
	EOI/EOII	#	*	80
	AO	#	*	39
	AA	#	*	15
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	#	#	238

DEPARTMENT: DFP

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	15	0	15
	G6/G7	146	11	157
	DP	#	*	225
	SO	241	11	252
	EOI/EOII	422	22	444
	AO	473	12	485
	AA/Industrial	#	*	83
	All	1592	69	1661

DEPARTMENT: DEL

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	32	*	#
	DP	56	*	#
	SO	104	*	#
	EOI/EOII	618	13	631
	AO	384	*	#
	AA	44	0	44
	Industrial	0	0	0
	All	1238	33	1271

DEPARTMENT: DHSSPS

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	#	*	68
	DP	#	*	71
	SO	#	*	74
	EOI/EOII	#	*	74
	AO/AA	#	*	32
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	298	21	319

DEPARTMENT: DOE

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	64	19	83
	DP	140	18	158
	SO	#	#	265
	EOI/EOII	303	22	325
	AO	447	14	461
	AA	#	*	78
	Industrial	#	*	24
	All	1302	92	1394

DEPARTMENT: DRD

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	#	*	38
	DP	#	*	97
	SO	#	*	151
	EOI/EOII	318	16	334
	AO	#	*	167
	AA	#	*	174
	Industrial	217	20	237
	All	1140	58	1198

DEPARTMENT: DSD

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	65	*	#
	DP	122	*	#
	SO	246	*	#
	EOI/EOII	1504	29	1533
	AO	2147	38	2185
	AA	323	13	336
	Industrial	0	0	0
	All	4407	92	4499

DEPARTMENT: OFMDFM

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	#	*	11
	G6/G7	#	*	21
	DP	#	*	37
	SO	#	*	38
	EOI/EOII	#	*	33
	AO/AA	#	*	24
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	#	*	164

DEPARTMENT: DOJ

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	#	*	12
	G6/G7	#	*	51
	DP	76	15	91
	SO	150	35	185
	EOI/EOII	225	30	255
	AO	286	52	338
	AA/Industrial	#	*	43
	All	827	148	975

DEPARTMENT: PPS

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	36	*	#
	DP	65	*	#
	SO	14	*	#
	EOI/EOII	46	*	#
	AO	80	*	#
	AA	56	*	#
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	297	18	315

DEPARTMENT: ALL

		Community Background		
		Catholic Headcount	Not Determined Headcount	Group Total Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	86	17	103
	G6/G7	644	84	728
	DP	1051	77	1128
	SO	1543	113	1656
	EOI/EOII	4119	180	4299
	AO	4398	139	4537
	AA	954	35	989
	Industrial	475	48	523
	All	13270	693	13963

Notes:

Data sourced from HRConnect at 1st Jan 2011 and external DOJ databases

Data includes all NICS Permanent Staff in the 'Catholic' and 'Not Determined' Community Background Categories

The analogous grade groupings match those used in AQW 481 11-15 to prevent disclosure of confidential data. In cases where this would result in disclosure a total for the department has been provided.

* Cell sizes less than 10 have not been released to ensure confidentiality

Cell has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of suppressed data in a neighbouring cell.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to procurement by his Department, (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1105/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The requirement to secure Accounting Officer approval for all single tender actions was formalised in June 2010 with the issue of Procurement Guidance Note 03/10 by Central Procurement Directorate.

Information on the 5 occasions in which a supplier has been secured through a single tender which did not have advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer by the Department in 2010-11 is provided at Annex A. Information for prior years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

ANNEX A

SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS WITHOUT ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BY THE ACCOUNTING OFFICER DURING 2010-11

(i) Reason for no advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer	(ii) Level of Expenditure	(iii) Name of supplier	(iv) Date of Retrospective Approval
The branch involved did not appreciate that prior Accounting Officer approval was required in this instance. Accounting Officer approval was sought for the December 2010 accreditation exercise and the appropriate approvals will now be sought going forward.	£2,595	UK Accreditation Service	20/12/10
The branch involved did not appreciate that prior Accounting Officer approval was required in this instance. Accounting Officer approval was sought for the December 2010 exercise and the appropriate approvals will now be sought going forward.	£2,290	SGS (UK) Ltd	10/12/10
Senior management approved the expenditure on the basis that it was not viewed as a Single Tender Action. A re-assessment, resulted in this being classified as a Single Tender Action which has now been notified to the Accounting Officer.	£30,000	Business in the Community	Notified to Accounting Officer 10/6/11
Senior management approved the expenditure on the basis that it was not viewed as a Single Tender Action. A re-assessment, resulted in this being classified as a Single Tender Action which has now been notified to the Accounting Officer.	£20,000	Business in the Community	Notified to Accounting Officer 10/6/11
Senior management approved the expenditure on the basis that it was not viewed as a Single Tender Action. A re-assessment, resulted in this being classified as a Single Tender Action which has now been notified to the Accounting Officer.	£30,000	Business in the Community	Notified to Accounting Officer 10/6/11

Dormant Accounts Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the implementation of the Dormant Accounts Scheme.

(AQW 1157/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As you will be aware, this is a UK Government-led initiative and is dependent on a number of factors including the timing and the amount of funding released by the Banks to the Reclaim Fund.

It is difficult to predict the precise amount that will be available for distribution given that this will depend on the success of the ongoing campaign to reunite individuals with their assets, and the sums held back by the Reclaim Fund for future customer reclaim.

Therefore, I have decided to wait until there is greater certainty around the amounts which are likely to be available for the Dormant Accounts Scheme, before making my recommendations to the First Minister and deputy First Minister for endorsement I will then bring them to the Executive.

Rateable Valuations

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what relationship exists between the median rent for a property in a town centre and the level of rateable valuations for properties in the same town centre.

(AQW 1221/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rateable values of all commercial properties in Northern Ireland are based on their Net Annual Value (NAV) which, for the current Valuation List, is an estimate of rental value at a common valuation date of 1st April 2001. Under rating law in Northern Ireland, rateable values (NAVs) are generally not altered unless at a general Revaluation, at which time all properties are re-valued at a new valuation date.

The existing legislation, therefore, does not allow for indexing between declines in footfall and drops in median rentals in town centres and the level of current rateable valuations in these town centres. Such factors can only be considered at a future Revaluation of commercial properties, the next scheduled to come into effect in 2015.

Rateable Valuations

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what relationship exists between the footfall in town centres and the level of rateable valuation for properties in the same town centres.

(AQW 1222/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rateable values of all commercial properties in Northern Ireland are based on their Net Annual Value (NAV) which, for the current Valuation List, is an estimate of rental value at a common valuation date of 1st April 2001. Under rating law in Northern Ireland, rateable values (NAVs) are generally not altered unless at a general Revaluation, at which time all properties are re-valued at a new valuation date.

The existing legislation, therefore, does not allow for indexing between declines in footfall and drops in median rentals in town centres and the level of current rateable valuations in these town centres. Such factors can only be considered at a future Revaluation of commercial properties, the next scheduled to come into effect in 2015.

Rateable Valuations

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any form of indexing exists between (i) declines in footfall; and (ii) drops in median rentals in town centres and the level of rateable valuation in those town centres.

(AQW 1223/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rateable values of all commercial properties in Northern Ireland are based on their Net Annual Value (NAV) which, for the current Valuation List, is an estimate of rental value at a common valuation date of 1st April 2001. Under rating law in Northern Ireland, rateable values (NAVs) are generally not altered unless at a general Revaluation, at which time all properties are re-valued at a new valuation date.

The existing legislation, therefore, does not allow for indexing between declines in footfall and drops in median rentals in town centres and the level of current rateable valuations in these town centres. Such factors can only be considered at a future Revaluation of commercial properties, the next scheduled to come into effect in 2015.

The Block Grant

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a detailed breakdown of the £900m over and above the block grant which has been included in the budget.

(AQW 1432/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As part of the budget process the Executive explored a wide range of initiatives that might generate additional revenue for the Executive to allocate.

The £900 million included in the Budget 2011-15 over the four year period is in addition to the annual Block Grant and the existing level of rates receipts.

- £200 million additional revenue to be generated from the regional rate increase;
- £444 million of capital receipts identified by departments;
- £100 million of capital receipts to be generated by the Central Asset Management Unit;
- £23 million of capital carried forward from 2010-11
- £40 million contribution from the Belfast Port
- £80 million in respect of the Housing Associations' increased contribution to housing starts; and
- £12 million from the Plastic Bag Levy.

The ministerial Budget Review Group will continue to assess other initiatives that might offer up further funding resources that might be available for allocation over the forthcoming four year budget period.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Abortions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 203/11-15, whether he will review the current practice of not recording and collating the reasons for abortions.
(AQW 768/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): On 13 March 2009 my Department asked the then HSS Boards and Trusts to develop a regional care pathway and pro-forma to record terminations of pregnancy in Northern Ireland.

This work has ceased pending a decision on how to comply with the 2004 Court of Appeal order requiring my Department to produce Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the

issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 985/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since May 2007, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting on 28 November 2007

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting on 28 May 2008

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting on 10 June 2009

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting on 25 November 2009

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting on 2 June 2010

Health and Food Safety Sectoral Meeting On 10 November 2010

Plenary Meeting on 7 February 2008

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 986/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) By definition, co-operative activities may be put forward by one or other Department but would become “joint” when adopted. Since May 2007, the following schemes, projects and initiatives have involved co-operation between my Department and:
 - (a) Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies:
 - Co-operation And Working Together (CAWT) projects (see www.cawt.com/)
 - The Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute of the USA Cancer Consortium including a wide range of co-operative projects, schemes, conferences and initiatives (including cancer registries co-operation, cancer prevention fellowship programme and courses, telesynergy, clinical trials network, and nurse training in clinical research, etc) (see www.allirelandnci.com/)
 - Oral and Maxillo Facial Surgery co-operation in the North-West (this service is now main-streamed)
 - GP Cross-border Out-of-Hours Pilot Projects (one between Inishowen and Derry/Londonderry; and the other between Keady and Castleblaney)
 - Exercise Medical Bridge – participation in cross-border emergency planning exercises (2007 and 2008)
 - Pandemic Flu Planning and co-operation (this involves the sharing of information on planning and preparedness, and has not involved funding or joint working on operational issues)
 - Fire and Rescue co-operation with regard to fire prevention and planning, and for incidents such as road traffic accidents, fires in property, forest fires and flooding
 - Cross-border First Responder Schemes

- Co-operation on Radiotherapy Services (including the present arrangements for Donegal Patients to receive treatment at the Belfast Cancer Centre and the planned Satellite Radiotherapy Facility at Altnagelvin Hospital)
- Co-operation in Health Promotion including physical activity, research, nutrition, health promoting hospitals, training, workplace health, men's health, mental health and breastfeeding, tobacco controls, drugs and alcohol initiatives
- All-Island Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (incorporating a rolling programme of initiatives to encourage cross-border co-operation in the prevention of suicide and self-harm)
- Child Protection Inter-Departmental Coordinating Group (with sub-groups on Internet Safety; Protocol for Movement of Children/Vulnerable Families across borders; All-Island Media Awareness; Research; and Vetting and Barring – with separate initiatives and schemes in each)
- the North/South child protection hub, which is a dedicated online resource to be used by policymakers, professional practitioners, researchers and educators to share and improve knowledge, develop evidence-based practice and, ultimately, assist the safeguarding of vulnerable children was launched by Ministers on 10 November 2010 (see www.nscph.com/ and www.childlink.co.uk/)
- “Out of Programme” Training initiative enabling doctors to undertake training in the RoI (run by the the NI Medical and Dental Training Agency)
- Paediatric and Congenital Cardiac Surgery Services
- All-Ireland Contract for Clinical Waste Management
- Programmes and initiatives of the Food Safety Promotion Board (SafeFood) (see www.safefood.eu/)

Note - in the case of the above list the Department of Health and Children was the main Republic of Ireland Government Department involved – this is now split between the Department of Health and the separate Department of Children. In respect of the Fire and Rescue Services item, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is the main link.

(b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation

- The Institute for Public Health (funded by both DHSSPS and DoH) is involved in a number of projects and initiatives on an all-island basis - aimed at strengthening public health intelligence, supporting health impact assessment in N Ireland, capacity building and policy and programme development, and evaluation (see www.publichealth.ie/)
- The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) is jointly involved in the All-Island Suicide Prevention Plan (see www.nosp.ie/)
- Some Republic of Ireland NGOs participate in the Child Protection Sub-Groups eg the Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and Barnardo's Ireland are contributing members.

(ii) I anticipate that we will continue to have collaboration at various levels on these and other issues of mutual interest in the future.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the redundancies recently announced by Southern Cross Healthcare.

(AQW 1008/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 722/11-15.

Cystic Fibrosis

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research his Department has carried out on gene therapy as a preventative measure for people with Cystic Fibrosis. **(AQW 1013/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Research on Cystic Fibrosis is especially strong in Northern Ireland, involving Health and Social Care Trusts and both universities. The Health & Social Care Research & Development Fund, provided by this Department, supports this work in two ways.

Firstly, funding goes to Trusts for the employment of research nurses, physiotherapists and other support staff in the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network. This enables patients to be involved in clinical trials of potential new treatments.

Secondly, research funding supports individual projects. One major project involves collaboration between clinical researchers at Queen's University Belfast, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and University of North Carolina in the United States of America. Our funding goes only to researchers in Northern Ireland while the work in the Republic of Ireland and the United States is funded separately from within those jurisdictions. The work is at the forefront of international efforts to provide better treatments for cystic fibrosis patients and will represent a total investment of some £5 million.

These international collaborations have led to the development of a new drug, called VX-770. The drug is a significant breakthrough for all cystic fibrosis sufferers as it is the first drug shown to be an effective treatment against the basic defect in that disease. Through the Department's support for research and clinical trials, patients in Northern Ireland have been provided with access to the treatment.

Gene therapy for cystic fibrosis is a longer term objective. Research and clinical trials are underway in the UK and our local cystic fibrosis clinical research leader, Professor Stuart Elborn, chairs the Scientific Advisory Committee of the UK Gene Therapy Consortium. Professor Elborn and his clinical colleagues will ensure that people with cystic fibrosis in Northern Ireland will benefit from this therapy in the future if it is shown to be effective.

George Sloan Centre in Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) average; (ii) shortest; and (iii) longest distance travelled by clients to the George Sloan Centre in Ballymena using Trust supplied transport, including the time taken to travel to the Centre and the time taken to return home from the Centre, **(AQW 1041/11-15)**

Mr Poots: In relation to distances travelled and time taken by clients using Trust provided transport to attend the George Sloan Centre in Ballymena is as follows:

- (i) average distance travelled - 5-6 miles;
- (ii) shortest distance travelled - ½ mile; and
- (iii) longest distance travelled - 15 miles.

I am advised that clients who live within the town area would be on the transport provided for approximately 30 minutes while those who live in country areas could be on transport for approximately 1½ hours.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs. **(AQW 1053/11-15)**

Mr Poots: In relation to (i), the disclosure of actual salary is exempt under the Data Protection Act. Information on spending in relation to Special Advisers for the period May 2007 to 21 March 2011, the latest date available, is set out below.

- (i) Annual Salary costs: within the Pay Band £57,300 (Min) - £82,531 (Max)
- (ii) Employers Pension Contributions: 21.5% - 23.5% over the period
- (iii) Expenses: £340 (rounded to the nearest £10)
- (iv) Office costs: there were no incremental office costs as the Special Adviser used existing accommodation
- (v) Other costs: £36,840 (rounded to the nearest £10)

School Nurses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the eligibility criteria used to determine whether a nurse is allocated to (i) a primary school; and (ii) a special needs school.

(AQW 1060/11-15)

Mr Poots: All schools in Northern Ireland have a named school nurse. Through school nursing the school age population receive the universal child health promotion programme.

Where children are educated in schools for children with special needs, Trusts support these schools with an appropriate model of provision of nursing services based on the assessment of pupil health needs within the school. This is continuously reviewed and updated as needs of pupils change.

Rosemount Care Centre, Portadown

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are being taken to ensure that the care arrangements for residents in Rosemount Care Centre, Portadown are not adversely affected as a result of the financial difficulties being experienced by Southern Cross Healthcare.

(AQW 1083/11-15)

Mr Poots: Southern Cross Healthcare is currently working with its landlords to restructure and stabilise the company in order to ensure continuity of care for all residents. Throughout this process my primary concern is the welfare of residents in Southern Cross homes, including Rosemount Care Centre, and my Officials are working closely with the HSC Board to ensure that contingency plans are in place to cover a range of potential outcomes from these discussions to ensure the welfare of residents is protected.

Regulating the Administration of Treatments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider regulating the administration of treatments such as botox to minors.

(AQW 1104/11-15)

Mr Poots: As a prescription only medicine, botulinum toxin for injection is covered by the Medicines Act. As a result there are strict controls on its manufacture, supply, storage and administration. Any breach of these controls may constitute a criminal offence which would be pursued by The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in collaboration with my Department. Good professional practice in this area was highlighted recently in correspondence from The Chief Nursing Officer, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer and The Department's Lead allied Health Professional.

Botox must be administered by, or under the supervision of a registered healthcare practitioner who must comply with the standards set by their professional regulator. All regulators have issued guidance on obtaining consent for treatment, for which there are particular considerations when treating minors.

I have no plans to extend beyond this regulatory regime at present.

Patient Transfers from the Down and Mourne Area

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients from the Down and Mourne area were transferred for treatment and investigation to each hospital in the greater Belfast area between 1 April 2011 and the 31 May 2011; (ii) how many of these patients were transferred between 10pm and 8am; and (iii) what were the comparable figures for patient transfer for the same period in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010.

(AQW 1125/11-15)

Mr Poots: For the purpose of answering this question, the Down and Mourne area has been defined as the South Down Parliamentary Constituency.

(I) THE NUMBER OF PATIENTS FROM THE SOUTH DOWN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY THAT WERE TRANSFERRED FOR TREATMENT AND INVESTIGATION TO EACH EMERGENCY CARE DEPARTMENT IN THE GREATER BELFAST AREA BETWEEN 1 APRIL 2011 AND THE 31 MAY 2011 IS DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

Emergency Care Department	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency
Belfast City Hospital	40
Royal Victoria Hospital	81
Mater Hospital	*
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	33
Lagan Valley Hospital	56
Ulster Hospital	218

Source: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

(II) THE NUMBER OF THESE PATIENTS THAT WERE TRANSFERRED BETWEEN 10PM AND 8AM IS DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

Emergency Care Department	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency between 10pm and 8am
Belfast City Hospital	10
Royal Victoria Hospital	20
Mater Hospital	*
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	12
Lagan Valley Hospital	28
Ulster Hospital	69

Source: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

(III) (A) COMPARABLE FIGURES FOR PATIENT TRANSFER FOR THE SAME PERIOD IN 2009 IS DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

Emergency Care Department	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency between 10pm and 8am
Belfast City Hospital	37	5
Royal Victoria Hospital	41	8
Mater Hospital	*	0
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	48	8
Lagan Valley Hospital	46	9
Ulster Hospital	152	51

Source: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

(B) COMPARABLE FIGURES FOR PATIENT TRANSFER FOR THE SAME PERIOD IN 2010 IS DETAILED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

Emergency Care Department	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency	No. of transfers from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency between 10pm and 8am
Belfast City Hospital	37	7
Royal Victoria Hospital	68	13
Mater Hospital	*	0
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	24	8
Lagan Valley Hospital	31	10
Ulster Hospital	152	45

Source: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

In order to avoid personal disclosure an ‘*’ represents a cell count of less than 4.

Accident and Emergency Units

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the target waiting time for a patient presenting at an accident and emergency unit to be seen by a senior house doctor, staff grade registrar or a consultant; (ii) what the current average waiting time for patients presenting is at the (a) Ulster Hospital, Dundonald; (b) Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast; and (c) Mater Hospital, Belfast; and (iii) what the waiting times are between 10pm and 8am.

(AQW 1126/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department set out the following emergency care waiting times Priorities for Action (PfA) target for 2010/11:

- (i) ‘From April 2010, HSC Board and Trusts should ensure 95% of patients attending any A&E department are either treated and discharged home, or admitted within four hours of their arrival in the department. No patient should wait longer than 12 hours.’

- (ii) Information on average emergency care waiting times is not readily available, as my Department does not routinely collect information on emergency care attendances at a patient level. However, information is available on the number of patients waiting less than 4 hours, from 4 to 12 hours, and over 12 hours in emergency care departments during the month of May 2011, and is detailed in the table below:

Emergency Care Department	Emergency care waiting time from arrival to departure			Total New & Unplanned Review attendances
	Within 4 hours	4 to 12 hours	Over 12 hours	
(a) Ulster	5,343	1109	105	6,557
(b) Royal Victoria	4,645	1,425	148	6,218
(c) Mater	2,564	872	131	3,567

Source: Departmental EC1 Return

1 Information for May 2011 is provisional

- (iii) Information on emergency care waiting times between 10pm and 8am is not readily available, as my Department does not routinely collect information on emergency care attendances during specific time periods.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to procurement by his Department, (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case. **(AQW 1139/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The requirement to secure Accounting Officer approval for all single tender actions was introduced in June 2010 through Procurement Guidance Note 03/10 issued by DFP's Central Procurement Directorate. Subject to that, the following table contains data relevant to the period covered by the question:

Period	No. of Single Tender Actions	Full Contract Value £	Approval under PGN 03/10
May 2007 to March 2008	2	11,900	-
2008-09	3	8,329	-
2009-10	4	20,284	-
April 2010 to 16 June 2010	-	-	-
17 June 2010 to March 2011	1*	45,000	Yes

* This item represents Professor Appleby's report updating his 2005 Independent Review of Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland, which had been commissioned by DFP

3fivetwo Healthcare

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the position in relation to the review of patients who have been referred to 3fivetwo Healthcare for a consultation or

for treatment; and who is responsible for any complications that might arise as a result of treatments provided.

(AQW 1150/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board manages contracts with the independent sector on behalf of the HSC in Northern Ireland.

The Board has advised me that it is the independent sector provider which is responsible for review appointments up to a maximum specified in the terms of the contract. This will vary according to specialty.

The responsibility for any complications which might arise is dependent on the nature and circumstances of the complication and where and when it arises. Emergencies will be referred to the nearest HSC facility which can treat the case. Complications arising from surgery are the responsibility of the independent sector provider unless the matter is complex and requires to be treated in the local HSC.

Point of Sale Ban on Tobacco Products

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the point of sale ban on tobacco products will be implemented on 1 July 2011; and when the regulations relating to this ban will be published.

(AQW 1169/11-15)

Mr Poots: Regulations to ban the display of tobacco products at point of sale will not be implemented from 1 July 2011, as proposed in the public consultation exercise.

I will decide on a new commencement date for a tobacco display ban once I have fully considered the responses to the consultation exercise. In making my decision, I will take into account the need for retailers to have a reasonable period of notice in order to make the necessary adaptations to their premises.

Agenda for Change Joint Negotiating Forum

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what progress has been made by the Agenda for Change Joint Negotiating Forum which met in June 2011 to discuss pay band issues; (ii) to detail the Forum's terms of reference; (iii) when its final report will be published; and (iv) what impact these meetings will have on the inequality of pay of some Theatre Assistants at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 1192/11-15)

Mr Poots: I should first of all point out that the particular issue that has been raised is not confined to the Belfast HSC Trust; it has the potential to affect over 2,000 staff within all Health and Social Care organisations. It is therefore important that this matter is resolved on a regional basis and not in piecemeal fashion.

My Department is currently facilitating delicate regional negotiations between HSC employers and Health Service Trade Unions to resolve this particular issue in a pragmatic way. These negotiations are at a critical stage and I would not wish to jeopardise the outcome by making assumptions on the outcome or indeed a date for the resolution of these matters.

I understand that the Trade Unions are using their normal democratic structures to communicate with their members on this matter.

Food Safety Promotion Board

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed by the Food Safety Promotion Board in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1253/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Food Safety Promotion Board employs 30.8 Whole-Time Equivalent (WTE) staff, all of whom are employed in the Republic of Ireland.

Research on Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many licences have been granted for research on animals in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1256/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of new project and personal licences granted in each of the last three years in Northern Ireland is given in the table below.

	2008	2009	2010
Project licence	22	23	16
Personal licence	73	75	60

A project licence is granted when the Department considers that the use of living animals in a programme of work, for a purpose permitted by the Act, is justified and that the methods proposed are appropriate.

A personal licence is the Department's endorsement of the holder as a suitable and competent person to carry out specified procedures on specified animals, under supervision where necessary.

Use of Primates for Research Purposes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he would consider introducing a ban on the use of primates for research purposes.

(AQW 1258/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am not considering introducing a ban on the use of primates for research purposes. No primates have been used for research in Northern Ireland since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Working Group

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the current status of his Department's Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Working Group which last met in June 2010; and to outline its forward work programme.

(AQW 1335/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am aware of the stakeholder group which was established in 2009 in association with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Public Health Agency, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives to examine how access to the services required by Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) sufferers might be improved. I understand that at the time the group last met in June 2010 it was clear that the issues being raised in the group would be best handled in the context of commissioning of services and so the HSCB, who have responsibility for commissioning, were asked to consider arrangements for engaging with ME stakeholders.

The HSC Board advises that each of the Commissioning Service teams within the Board and the five Local Commissioning Groups, have already established, or are in the process of establishing, arrangements to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including patients and clients. Specifically in relation to ME, the relevant Commissioning Service team has been asked to consider how best to engage with this group of patients and will report to the Department on progress in due course.

Coeliac Disease

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with Coeliac disease in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1336/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people diagnosed with coeliac disease in Northern Ireland is not available.

The only information held by the Department in relation to coeliac disease is the number of patients admitted to hospital for inpatient or day case care with a diagnosis of coeliac disease; these data have been tabled below.

Financial Year	No. of Admissions
2000/01	353
2001/02	448
2002/03	358
2003/04	368
2004/05	451
2005/06	544
2006/07	581
2007/08	636
2008/09	662
2009/10	729

Source: Hospital Inpatients System.

It should be noted that any individual could have been admitted to hospital more than once during any given time period and would therefore be counted more than once in the above figures.

Angiogram

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the current waiting time is for an angiogram.

(AQW 1363/11-15)

Mr Poots: The waiting time for an angiogram at 31st March 2011, the most recent date for which data are available, is presented in the table below:

	Waiting time in weeks for an angiogram at 31st March 2011						Total
	0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-36	>36	
Number of people waiting	498	380	174	82	19	1	1,154

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Animal Experimentation

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5026/11, whether he will consider developing a policy on animal experimentation which is separate from that of the Home Office.

(AQW 1398/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to develop a policy on animal experimentation separate from that of the Home Office.

Department of Justice

Sex Offenders: Addresses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the two recent cases where registered sex offenders gave addresses of 'a park bench' and 'under a bridge', whether he intends to amend existing or introduce new legislation to deal with instances where vague addresses are provided.

(AQW 735/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I intend to publish a consultation paper, in July, on a number of reforms to the sex offender notification requirements in the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

The consultation paper includes a proposal to amend the Act to require notified sex offenders who have no sole or main residence to notify weekly to the police details of a place where they can be found.

Kettling

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the use of 'kettling' by police as a form of riot control.

(AQW 748/11-15)

Mr Ford: Decisions regarding crowd control is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Convictions for Riot-Related Offences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many people have been (a) prosecuted; and (b) convicted for riot related offences which occurred in Belfast during the 12th July period 2010; and (ii) of these, how many (a) had a previous criminal record; and (b) had a previous criminal record for similar offences.

(AQW 795/11-15)

Mr Ford: Based on information provided by the Public Prosecution Service (as of 22 June), 39 defendants have been proceeded against in respect of riots in Belfast (Ardoyne) during the 12th July period 2010. Of these, 38 have been convicted and summary proceedings against one defendant are ongoing. One additional youth was dealt with by way of a diversionary youth conference.

A further 37 persons were proceeded against in respect of an earlier incident at Ardoyne, connected to a 'sit down protest'. Of these, one has been convicted; 29 have pleaded not guilty and are awaiting trial; proceedings against one defendant are ongoing; and summonses are being issued / re-issued for six persons.

As the majority of those convicted are awaiting sentence, the disclosure of the number with previous criminal records could be deemed prejudicial to the matter of sentencing and interfere with Article 6 of The European Convention on Human Rights.

Independent Members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether he will reconsider the decision not to pay independent members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, given the dangers associated with such appointments.

(AQW 855/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Justice Act passed by the Assembly in May 2010, included a measure to pay expenses only, and not allowances, to independent members of the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs).

Not paying allowances to members of the PCSPs will protect the amount of funding that can be directed towards front line projects which can make a real difference on the ground. This was my main intention in recommending this course of action.

I am keen that members are not out of pocket as a result of their contribution to PCSPs, and they will be able to claim expenses.

I am extremely grateful to all members of the current District Policing Partnerships, and in particular those who have suffered cowardly attacks and intimidation, for their strength of purpose, courage of conviction and determination to serve. However, allowances were not intended to compensate for any risks to the personal safety of DPP members that may have arisen during their service and I do not intend to reinstate them for the new PCSPs.

CCTV Cameras in the Coleraine Borough Council Area

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice whether the CCTV cameras in the Coleraine Borough Council area are considered to be state-of-the-art, and whether he has any plans to upgrade them.

(AQW 876/11-15)

Mr Ford: This response deals with the town centre CCTV cameras funded by the DoJ under the 'Looking Out for You' CCTV Challenge Fund Competition, which included 4 in Coleraine, 5 in Portrush and 3 in Portstewart.

DoJ funded the installation of the cameras but under the terms of the Challenge Fund competition, ownership of the cameras and equipment rests with the CCTV operators.

As the cameras funded by DoJ in Coleraine, Portrush and Portstewart have only recently become fully operational I understand there are no plans to up-grade them.

There may be a number of other CCTV cameras operational within the Coleraine Borough Council area, both private and statutory, however,

these do not fall to the responsibility of the DoJ.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of Magistrate Court cases have been paid for by Legal Aid in each of the last twelve months, broken down by court division.

(AQW 945/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the award of legal aid is recorded by defendant, I have provided figures for the percentage of defendants who have been awarded legal aid. In a very small number of cases the same defendant may have appeared more than once in the Magistrates Court and been awarded legal aid on more than one occasion.

The percentage of defendants in Magistrates' Court cases paid for by legal aid over the past twelve months cannot yet be provided, as not all claims have yet been lodged with the Legal Services Commission.

% OF TOTAL DEFENDANTS IN THE MAGISTRATES' COURT WHO HAD AT LEAST ONE LEGAL AID ORDER MADE(JUNE 2010- MAY 2011)

June 2010	Month												
	July 2010	Aug 2010	Sept 2010	Oct 2010	Nov 2010	Dec 2010	Jan 2011	Feb 2011	Mar 2011	April 2011	May 2011	Total	
Belfast	43%	46%	44%	43%	49%	46%	49%	48%	48%	46%	55%	46%	47%
Londonderry	48%	45%	48%	47%	49%	44%	52%	40%	52%	50%	42%	47%	47%
Antrim	43%	46%	48%	42%	47%	39%	43%	47%	53%	50%	44%	49%	46%
Fermanagh and Tyrone	36%	42%	35%	37%	36%	34%	30%	34%	36%	36%	36%	37%	36%
Armagh and South Down	32%	44%	34%	34%	31%	33%	32%	35%	29%	26%	33%	37%	33%
Ards	35%	37%	42%	43%	41%	44%	51%	45%	44%	47%	42%	48%	43%
Craigavon	37%	47%	44%	39%	42%	49%	36%	42%	45%	43%	43%	50%	43%
Total	40%	44%	42%	41%	43%	42%	43%	42%	44%	43%	44%	45%	43%

Convicted Juveniles and Young Adults

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) juveniles; and (ii) young adults who have been convicted of an offence in each of the last three years, broken down by court division. **(AQW 950/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The tables below give the number of juveniles (aged 10 to 17) and young adults (those aged 18 to 30 have been documented) convicted of an offence broken down by age group and court division.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The tables cover the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

NUMBER OF JUVENILES (AGED 10-17) AND YOUNG ADULTS (AGED 18-30) CONVICTED BY AGE GROUP AND COURT DIVISION 2004

Court division	Age group			
	10-17	18-21	22-25	26-30
Antrim	264	799	589	562
Ards	236	781	613	535
Armagh and South Down	130	570	469	466
Belfast	467	1,766	1,460	1,174
Craigavon	145	550	364	346
Fermanagh and Tyrone	168	728	558	483
Londonderry	178	639	469	469
Total	1,588	5,833	4,522	4,035

NUMBER OF JUVENILES (AGED 10-17) AND YOUNG ADULTS (AGED 18-30) CONVICTED BY AGE GROUP AND COURT DIVISION 2005

Court division	Age group			
	10-17	18-21	22-25	26-30
Antrim	183	802	584	500
Ards	194	666	514	423
Armagh and South Down	129	572	517	489
Belfast	439	1,409	1,196	1,076
Craigavon	160	531	435	332
Fermanagh and Tyrone	140	699	545	460
Londonderry	210	769	495	477
Total	1,455	5,448	4,286	3,757

NUMBER OF JUVENILES (AGED 10-17) AND YOUNG ADULTS (AGED 18-30) CONVICTED BY AGE GROUP AND COURT DIVISION 2006

Court division	Age group			
	10-17	18-21	22-25	26-30
Antrim	156	764	593	503
Ards	189	648	537	462
Armagh and South Down	64	583	563	517
Belfast	372	1,084	955	865
Craigavon	150	569	438	378
Fermanagh and Tyrone	170	1,086	808	747
Londonderry	172	772	555	448
Total	1,273	5,506	4,449	3,920

Young Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the number of young offenders who have spent a period of their life living in care; and whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety about decreasing this trend.

(AQW 980/11-15)

Mr Ford: I cannot offer such an assessment because the Department of Justice does not have access to the “living in care” histories of all young offenders. However the Youth Justice Agency in conjunction with DHSSPS monitors on a continuing basis the number of current Looked After Children (LAC) placed in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre and also those children under supervision by its Community Services Directorate. Details are as follows:-

1) Children in Custody

INITIAL ADMISSIONS TO THE WOODLANDS JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRE – 2006/07 TO 2010/11:

Status(i)		06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
LAC:- Subject to Care Order	N	96	97	73	116	88
	%	29	28	27	33	21
LAC:- Voluntary Accommodated	N	-	-	-	10	65
	%	-	-	-	3	16
Not from Care	N	225	249	196	221	251
	%	68	72	72	63	61
Unknown	N	12	0	2	2	7
	%	4	0	1	1	2

(i) Year on year comparisons should be made with caution due to changes in recording in 2008/09

2) Children under Supervision

Of the 832 cases under supervision by the Youth Justice Agency Community Services Directorate at 31st March 2011, 7% were subject to a care order and a further 3% were voluntarily accommodated.

To date I have not had the opportunity to meet with the new Minister of DHSSPS. However, our respective officials are working together closely on a range of issues, including early interventions and ways of diverting LACs from the justice system.

Legal Aid Rates

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many barristers have agreed to work under the new Legal Aid rates.

(AQW 993/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date, 3 barristers have indicated that they are willing to undertake Crown Court work under the new remuneration arrangements.

Legal Aid Rates

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many solicitors or legal firms have agreed to work under the new Legal Aid rates; (ii) of these, how many regularly practise criminal law; and (iii) what was their Crown Court case load prior to the new rates being introduced.

(AQW 994/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) There are seven firms of solicitors included currently in the list of those willing to undertake Crown Court work under the new Legal Aid rates.
- (ii) & (iii) Information from the Law Society website indicates that all seven of the firms on the list practise criminal law. Since the introduction of the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules 2005, in April 2005, a total of 52 criminal aid certificates have been granted in respect of six of the seven firms. No criminal aid certificates have been granted to the remaining firm.

Police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice when payments under the Police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme will be made to former RUC officers.

(AQW 1007/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is the Department's intention to make payment to verified applicants of the Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as soon as possible. We are, however, presently awaiting the final view of the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to the tax and National Insurance treatment of these payments.

Preliminary Enquiry of a Case at a Magistrates' Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to remove the need for a preliminary enquiry of a case at a Magistrates Court before committal to Crown Court for trial, given that such hearings are mostly a formality and that the set Legal Aid fee could be saved.

(AQW 1044/11-15)

Mr Ford: Proposals for reforming committal proceedings are currently being considered and officials are planning to brief the Justice Committee after the summer break in the context of wider work on speeding up justice, with the intention of launching a public consultation shortly thereafter. It is intended that views will be sought on the potential for different ways of transferring cases to the Crown Court.

Legal Aid Rates

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to inform defendants, presently without representation and awaiting trial, of the details of solicitors and legal firms who are prepared to work under the new Legal Aid rates.

(AQW 1045/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in the Courts and Tribunals Service have written to all solicitors' firms in Northern Ireland asking if they are willing to take on Crown Court work under the new remuneration arrangements. They have compiled a list of firms willing to carry out legally aided Crown Court work. This list will continue to be provided to all defendants who are returned for trial without representation.

Preliminary Investigation of a Case at a Magistrates' Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to dispense with the preliminary investigation of a case at a Magistrates Court before committal to Crown Court for trial.

(AQW 1047/11-15)

Mr Ford: Proposals for reforming committal proceedings are currently being considered and officials are planning to brief the Justice Committee after the summer break in the context of wider work on speeding up justice, with the intention of launching a public consultation shortly thereafter. It is intended that views will be sought on the potential for different ways of transferring cases to the Crown Court.

Mandatory Six-Month Driving Disqualification

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, how many people have had the mandatory six-month driving disqualification imposed for accumulating the maximum penalty points on a driving licence in a three year period.

(AQW 1062/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information on the number of people is not available as a person may have more than one order imposed. However, the number of driving disqualification orders made, where a six-month driving disqualification was imposed for accumulating the maximum penalty points, is set out below:

238 in 2008

310 in 2009

347 in 2010

Historical Enquiries Team

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of the Historical Enquiries Team since its inception.

(AQW 1063/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Historical Enquiries Team is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Historical Enquiries Team

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted as a result of investigations carried out by the Historical Enquiries Team.

(AQW 1064/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Historical Enquiries Team is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Historical Enquiries Team

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) Republican; and (ii) Loyalist cases have been investigated by the Historical Enquiries Team since it was established.

(AQW 1065/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Historical Enquiries Team is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Child Contact Order

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether it is a criminal or civil offence to breach a Child Contact Order granted in the Family Court.

(AQW 1066/11-15)

Mr Ford: Breach of a contact order made by the Family Proceedings Court is not a criminal offence. Proceedings in respect of such a breach, however, may result in a fine or imprisonment.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 1079/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since the devolution of justice in April 2010 I have attended one North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary meeting on 5 July 2010.

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué, which sets out the issues and outcomes of each meeting, is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website: www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org.

After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a statement to the Assembly. Details of these statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

As Minister of Justice I do not attend 'sectoral' meetings of the NSMC. However, I meet regularly with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence under the auspices of an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters

That Agreement provides a framework for co-operation on criminal justice matters including public protection, management of sex offenders, support for victims of crime, youth justice, forensic science and promoting social diversity.

Since 12 April 2010, I have attended three formal meetings under the IGA, two with Dermot Ahern TD and one with Alan Shatter TD. At those meetings, Ministers were updated on a range of cross-border issues as well as discussing the progress of ad hoc Project Advisory Groups that cover a number of areas of mutual benefit.

Notable successes over the last twelve months have included agreement on a joint proposal to evaluate the use of the stable and acute risk assessment tool for sex offenders, as well as the

organisation of a joint seminar for the two probation services to showcase the extent of co-operation in public protection.

At our most recent meeting on 8 June 2011, Alan Shatter and I also signed a Memorandum of Understanding between our forensic science services which has been developed to provide for mutual support in the event of sudden loss or damage to facilities. We also agreed a new work programme, setting out priorities for cross-border co-operation over the next 12 months.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people who currently have cases at Crown Court level are not in receipt of Legal Aid.

(AQW 1088/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 23 June 2011 there are 315 defendants currently before the Crown Court who do not have legal aid.

Magistrates' Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether District Judges can refuse to grant solicitors' applications to come off record at Magistrates Court following a preliminary enquiry.

(AQW 1091/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no statutory provision in this regard. The response to solicitors in Magistrates' Courts who indicate that they intend to withdraw from proceedings and cease to act for a defendant is a matter for each District Judge (Magistrates' Courts).

Domestic Violence Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 682/11-15, whether he envisages the introduction of such guidelines or legislation on domestic violence in the future; and if so, what is the likely timescale.

(AQW 1198/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no plans to introduce guidelines or legislation that would make it compulsory for incidents of domestic violence to be treated as charge sheet instead of postal summons in the foreseeable future. I will, however, keep the matter under review.

High Court of Justice

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last two years, (i) how many applications to the High Court of Justice have been granted for orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief to convicted criminals who have served their sentence; and (ii) of these, how many applicants received legal aid and at what cost.

(AQW 1216/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information sought cannot be provided in respect of orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief which are still in place (whenever granted), as this would risk contravening the terms of an order of the court. In relation to orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief which are no longer extant, one has been made in the last two years. However, in relation to the specific information sought regarding an applicant, it is not possible to provide any information from which an applicant might be identified.

High Court of Justice

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last two years, (i) how many applications to the High Court of Justice have been granted for orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive

relief to convicted criminals who are currently in prison; and (ii) of these, how many applicants received legal aid and at what cost.

(AQW 1217/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information sought cannot be provided in respect of orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief which are still in place (whenever granted), as this would risk contravening the terms of an order of the court. In relation to orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief which are no longer extant, one has been made in the last two years. However, in relation to the specific information sought regarding an applicant, it is not possible to provide any information from which an applicant might be identified.

Drumcree Parade

Mr S Anderson asked Minister of Justice (i) whether he has met (a) the Parades Commission; and (b) the PSNI in relation to this year's Drumcree parade; and (ii) whether he discussed the public order implications of the Parade Commission's practice of issuing a determination each week to the Garvaghy Road Resident Group which continues to refuse to engage in dialogue.

(AQW 1377/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not discussed the Drumcree parade or the Parades Commission's approach to issuing determinations with either the Commission or the police.

Decisions in respect of parades are a matter for the Parades Commission, which is an independent body, and the policing of any determination made by the Commission is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Department for Regional Development

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 909/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Since May 2007, the Minister for Regional Development has attended NSMC meetings on the following dates:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ■ 17 July 2007 | Plenary |
| ■ 14 September 2007 | Transport Sectoral |
| ■ 17 October 2007 | Waterways Sectoral (Accompanying Minister) |
| ■ 12 December 2007 | Transport Sectoral |
| ■ 21 May 2008 | Transport Sectoral |
| ■ 04 July 2008 | Waterways & Language Sectorals (Accompanying Minister) |
| ■ 23 January 2009 | Plenary |
| ■ 03 April 2009 | Transport Sectoral |
| ■ 06 July 2009 | Plenary |
| ■ 08 July 2009 | Trade & Business Development Sectoral (Accompanying Minister) |
| ■ 04 November 2009 | Transport Sectoral |
| ■ 02 December 2009 | Waterways & Language Sectorals (Accompanying Minister) |

- 14 December 2009 Plenary
- 03 March 2010 Transport
- 30 June 2010 Trade & Business Development Sectoral(Accompanying Minister)
- 05 July 2010 Plenary
- 20 October 2010 Transport & Environment Sectorals
- 12 November 2010 Trade & Business Sectoral
- 21 January 2011 Plenary
- 09 February 2011 Transport Sectoral
- 10 June 2011 Plenary

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Capital Works

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what capital works his Department has planned for the South Antrim area over the next four years.

(AQW 933/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the detailed budget for planned capital works by my Department's Roads Service for the next four years has not yet been finalised, I am unable to provide the Member with details of such works in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency beyond the current financial year. Funding for capital works is allocated within each of Roads Service's four Divisions to council areas. The South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency area includes a number of council areas, namely Newtownabbey, Lisburn, Carrickfergus and Antrim.

I can advise that in the current financial year the following capital works are planned in that part of the Newtownabbey Council area which falls within the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency:

Signalisation Scheme	B90 Doagh Road/Carntall Road/Carnmoney Road North junction;
Street Lighting Renewal	Ballyearl Rise, Mossley;
Traffic Calming Scheme	Ballyeaston Village (incorporating Ballyeaston Road, Main Street, Trenchill Road, Ballynashee Road and Lower Ballyboley Road);
Traffic Calming Scheme	Rashee Park, Ballyclare (incorporating Rashee Drive, Erskine Park and Charles Way).

No capital works are planned for this financial year in the South Antrim area which falls within the Lisburn Council area. Details of the planned works for the current financial year in Carrickfergus and Antrim Council areas can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address: http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

In addition, the Member will be aware that the A8 scheme is currently subject to a Public Inquiry. Subject to the successful completion of the statutory procedures, and the availability of funding, it is anticipated that construction will commence in 2012, with completion of the scheme in 2014.

Information on work programmes for future years will, when detailed budgets are finalised, be presented in the Spring and Autumn reports to Councils.

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it does not hold specific details of capital projects by parliamentary constituency. However, it is believed that the following projects are within the South Antrim Constituency and are currently programmed for delivery over the next four years, subject to the availability of funding and the outcome of any future price control review:

Project Name

- Newtownabbey Zone Watermain Improvements Phase 2
- Carrickfergus Zone Watermain Improvements Phase 1
- Newtownabbey Zone Watermain Improvements Phase 1
- Capital Maintenance at Whitehouse WWTW
- A2 Shore Road Re-alignment – Greenisland
- Ballywonard Zone Watermain Improvements
- Ballyclare Waste Water Treatment Works Upgrade
- Greenisland Waste Water Treatment Works Refurbishment
- Ross's, Caughlins Lane, Ballyclare, Foul and Storm Sewer Extensions
- Dunore West Zone Watermain Improvements
- 390-404 Antrim Road, Newtownabbey, Storm Sewer Extension
- Birch Hill Road, Antrim, Foul & Storm Sewer Extensions
- Shane Street Randalstown Storm Sewer Extension
- 4 Steeple Road, Antrim, Foul and Storm Sewer Extensions
- Drumsough Road, Randalstown, Sewerage Scheme
- Ballyeaston Sewage System Upgrade
- 131 Doagh Road, Ballyclare, Storm Sewer Extension
- Granger's Mill, Muckamore, Wastewater Pumping Main Relocation
- Ballyrobert Road, Ballyclare, Storm Sewer Extension
- Bush Road, Antrim, Foul and Storm Sewer Extension
- Aspen View, Newtownabbey, Foul Sewer Extension
- Rashee Drive, Ballyclare, Storm Sewer Extension & Upgrade
- Cunningham Way, Antrim, Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- Moneynick Road, Toomebridge, Foul Sewer Extension
- Milltown Road, Antrim, Sewer Extension
- Crosskennan SR, Antrim, Water Pumping Station
- Glenavy Road, Crumlin, WWPS Site Investigation
- The Plains, Burnside Road, Doagh, Foul Sewer Extension

With regard to Translink's Capital Works, the first part of the table below details works planned for the South Antrim area over the next four years. The second part of the table provides expenditure on projects which will also benefit the South Antrim area:

Projects	2011/12 £000s	2012/13 £000s	2013/14 £000s	2014/15 £000s
Ballymartin / Templepatrick Passing Loop	0	0	25	25
Antrim Integrated Bus / Railway Station	965	1,214	0	0
Total	965	1,214	25	25
Others benefiting South Antrim Constituency				
New Trains Two	51,907	1,812	73	
Class 3000 Trains Overhaul (Phase 1)	1,907	1,613	2,779	2,469
Class 4000 Trains Overhaul	0	0	1,498	1,628
Class 3000 Trains Wi-Fi Equipment	600			
Long Line Public Announcement Renewal & Expansion Programme	192	288	0	0
Customer Information Service Programme	0	0	39	37
35 New Goldliners	7,000			
School Bus Signage and Lighting	493	501	0	0
Ulsterbus Engineering Workshop Pit Modifications	596	440	0	0
Building Services Upgrade Programme	448	1,150	58	1,079
Total	63,143	5,804	4,447	5,213

Winter Weather Conditions

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much grit has been allocated for the North Down area to combat the potential winter weather conditions of 2011/12; how does this compare to the previous two year's allocation.

(AQW 958/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the North Down area is serviced from a Roads Service depot located in Bangor, which also serves the Ards Peninsula and parts of Castlereagh and Belfast South. The proportion of salt allocated at the start of each winter service period and available for the North Down area, is approximately 700 to 750 tonnes per year. However, depending on the severity of the winter, the actual quantity of salt used in the area may be much more. I can advise that in the winter of 2009/10, Roads Service spread approximately 1550 tonnes of salt in the North Down area and approximately 1600 tonnes in the winter of 2010/11.

Throughout the winter period, Roads Service will continue to replenish salt stocks, as the need arises, to ensure that sufficient supplies are maintained.

Procurement and Allocation Procedures for Grit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what changes have been made to this year's procurement and allocation procedures for grit.

(AQW 959/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that no changes have been made to this year's procurement procedures for grit, as this is a local resource that is readily available across Northern Ireland, if and when required.

However, I can advise that the arrangements put in place last year to ensure salt stocks were successfully maintained have been enhanced, with procurement plans to increase both salt stocks and monthly delivery quotas, prior to and during the winter season.

These salt stocks will be allocated to salt barns, which are strategically placed in depots throughout Northern Ireland, and they will be filled to capacity prior to the start of the winter period.

New Road Surfacing Programmes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the new road surfacing programmes which are planned for Holywood in this financial year.

(AQW 961/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that details on road surfacing programmes planned for the North Down Borough Council area, including Holywood, can be found under the "Network Maintenance" section of the Roads Service Spring 2011 report to the Council and can be accessed from the following web address: <http://applications.drdni.gov.uk/publications/document.asp?docid=21894>

Blue Badges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 357/11-15, how many people who were successful in their appeals to renew their Blue Badge after further medical evidence was submitted, had medical evidence submitted by their GP at the request of and at the expense of his Department.

(AQW 995/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Road Service has advised that the database used to administer the Blue Badge Scheme does not hold the information requested. However, officials estimate that in only a relatively small number of successful appeal cases i.e. not more than 10 a year, has medical evidence been obtained at the Department's expense.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 1005/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Expenditure by my Department on Special Advisers since May 2007 is set out below.

Category	Expenditure
Salary	<p>May 2007-March 2008: £56,100-£78,540 (Pay Band B)</p> <p>April 2008-March 2009: £57,300-£79,740 (Pay Band B)</p> <p>April 2009-May 2011: £57,300-£82,531 (Pay Band B)</p> <p>June 2011-Ongoing: £57,300-£82,531 (Pay Band B)</p> <p>Employer's National Insurance contributions, based on salary, were also paid at the appropriate rates</p>
Employer's Pension Contributions	Employer's contribution rates are based on salary/age and are determined by the particular scheme/arrangement to which the Special Adviser belongs

Category	Expenditure
Expenses	£9,552 for the period May 2007 – May 2011
Office Costs	No office costs were incurred, given that the Special Adviser used existing NI Civil Service accommodation
Other costs	£1,830 (IT equipment) for the period May 2007 – May 2011

Residents-Only Parking Scheme in the Rosstulla Park Area

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to introduce a residents only parking scheme in the Rosstulla Park area, adjacent to the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, to ensure that residents are not restricted by vehicles parking in this area to avoid car parking charges at the University.

(AQW 1077/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the purpose of Residents' Parking schemes is to enable residents to find convenient on-street parking places close to their home. As the properties in Rosstulla Park have private driveways, a Residents' Parking Scheme is not considered to be a priority and there are no plans to introduce such a scheme in the area.

NI Water

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he can give an assurance that a more thorough and effective system for the public to report faults will be implemented by NI Water to avoid a repeat of the difficulties experienced last winter.

(AQW 1094/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that comprehensive internal and external reviews covering all aspects of the company's performance during last winter have identified areas for improvement. Implementation of the necessary corrective actions is a priority for NIW. The measures include improving call handling availability and improved arrangements for providing information on areas affected. These arrangements and improvements will be tested before the Winter.

The severe weather conditions experienced last December also led to customers suffering frozen pipes and burst pipes within their property. This was a significant contributory factor to the difficulties experienced and NIW is planning to raise public awareness of the need for pipes to be insulated and for supplies in vacant properties to be turned off.

Translink

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister for Regional Development, following his meeting with Translink officials, whether he can give an assurance that Translink will not enforce a fare rise or a reduction in less popular services in the coming months and years.

(AQW 1095/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have indicated that, on the basis of the assumptions within the agreed financial plan, there are no plans for any general fare increases for train and bus services during this year. Translink will continue to review service provision and will make service adjustments if necessary in order to reduce costs. This, in itself, ensures fare levels can be kept as low as possible.

South Tyrone Rural Transport

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for his assessment of the ongoing difficulties communities in the Erne East area of Fermanagh have experienced with Fermanagh and South Tyrone Rural Transport (FAST) in the last eight years including (a) the breaking of a contract in relation to payment for the lease of the Erne East bus; (b) groups being asked to pay more for transport than they

would if they had used private operators; (c) the blocking of funding for Erne East Social Car Service; and (d) the crashing of a bus and not informing the owners; (ii) whether his Department is aware that (a) FAST, in the knowledge that community transport services are to be reviewed, has paid a number of years' rent in advance for a larger property in Irvinestown; and (b) there is speculation of links between FAST directors and the owners of this building; (iii) whether his Department was involved in this arrangement; and (iv) whether the Department informed FAST that it would receive funding in future years.

(AQW 1127/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) I am not aware of any on-going difficulties being experienced by the communities in the Erne East area of Fermanagh with Fermanagh and South Tyrone Rural Transport Limited (FAST). I cannot make an assessment in regard to a-d. (ii) (a) My Department has not been made aware that FAST has paid a number of years' rent in advance for a property in Irvinestown. Funding from the Rural Transport Fund will be based upon the agreed business and financial plans agreed with the Partnership in the area.
- (ii) (b) My Department is aware that some Directors from FAST are also on the board of ITEC (Irvinestown Trustee Enterprise Company Ltd), and is also aware that FAST are based in one of their buildings. It is not clear if this is directly relevant to the speculation you refer to.
- (iii) My Department is not involved in this arrangement. FAST is an independent company, limited by guarantee.
- (iv) My Department has not informed FAST that it would receive funding in future years.

My officials are due to meet FAST on 07 July 2011. These matters can be raised at that time.

Bypass for Enniskillen

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Roads Service plans to construct a by-pass for Enniskillen.

(AQW 1128/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a preferred corridor for the Enniskillen Southern Bypass has been identified and it is intended that details will be put on public display in Enniskillen in July 2011.

Current funding levels do not allow for construction of the Bypass and the timing of further development work will be dependent on other competing priorities and the availability of funding in the future.

Schedule of Major and Minor Road Schemes

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress he has made in negotiations with the Minister of Finance and Personnel on the allocation of funding for the implementation of a schedule of major and minor road schemes in each of the next four financial years.

(AQW 1138/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware, the Executive's Final Budget sets out NI departments' funding for the four years 2011-15. The table below sets out the capital funding allocated to Roads Service for the next four years.

	2011-12 £m	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m
Capital Expenditure	155.9	257.5	385.4	379.2

The funding for Roads Service will support a number of major and minor roads schemes across the Budget period and these are set out in DRD's Spending Proposals published on the Department's website. As with any department, the allocations do not provide sufficient funding to enable all plans to be taken forward. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel has made clear that Departments should plan on the basis that this allocation represents a final allocation and will only be subject to adjustment as part of a future budget or in-year monitoring process. No further negotiation has taken place or is planned with the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Roads Service will register pressures or slippage on those schemes funded from the existing allocation at the appropriate monitoring round.

Defective Footpaths

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been paid in compensation for claims for personal injuries as a result of defective footpaths in the Carrickfergus area in each of the last two years.

(AQW 1225/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The particulars of the compensation payments are set out in the table below.

Year	Compensation Paid
2009/10	£7,200.00
2010/11	£14,450.00

Flags

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what steps he has taken to address the issue of flags which are flown throughout the summer in mixed communities and on arterial routes; and (ii) what steps he plans to take to remove flags bearing paramilitary slogans and emblems.

(AQW 1227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is signed up to the multi-agency Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas. The protocol indicates that the PSNI will take the lead where the display of flags of emblems is having a detrimental affect on the quality of life in a community.

Under the Protocol, Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to assist in the removal of unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached with the local community.

Roads Service will continue to cooperate with the PSNI and provide support facilities, such as tower wagons, to assist in the removal of flags, when asked to do so.

Department for Social Development

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development when his Department will introduce a boiler scrappage scheme.

(AQW 736/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): 'Warmer Healthier Homes - a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland' includes a new pilot boiler replacement scheme targeted at households where:

- the owner or tenant is aged 60 years or more;
- has an older inefficient boiler, i.e. 15 years or older; and,
- receives state pension with rates relief award.

Thirteen hundred homes across Northern Ireland will get their boilers replaced in a £2 million pilot scheme. The scheme will be launched in early July 2011.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on Jobseeker's Allowance in each of the last five years.

(AQW 790/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The amounts spent on Jobseekers Allowance in each of the last five years are as follows:

	2010-11 (£000s)	2009-10 (£000s)	2008-09 (£000s)	2007-08 (£000s)	2006-07 (£000s)
Jobseekers Allowance- Income Based	£157,807*	£130,352	£74,589	£57,465	£64,360
Jobseekers Allowance- Contribution Based	£26,666*	£31,637	£20,370	£10,193	£11,386
Total	£184,473*	£161,989	£94,959	£67,658	£75,746

* The figures for 2010-11 are draft and are subject to an audit review by the NI Audit Office.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department will continue to pay the Winter Fuel Allowance; and to detail the current rate paid to eligible applicants.

(AQW 822/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department will make winter fuel payments to all those eligible for the coming winter. The winter fuel payments scheme in Northern Ireland corresponds to that for Great Britain and in the winter of 2011/2012 people aged 60 and over will receive £200 and those aged 80 and over will receive £300.

Maintenance of Trees

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development what assistance is available to people who are in receipt of the state pension for the maintenance of trees on their land which are at risk of falling.

(AQW 856/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Depending on an individuals circumstances assistance from the Social Fund may be available to people in receipt of state pension, in these circumstances. Subject to the eligibility criteria being met, an individual pensioner maybe entitled to an interest free crisis loan to help them alleviate this problem if there is a serious damage or risk to their health or safety.

Welfare Reform Bill

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has held with his Ministerial counterparts in Westminster regarding the implications of the Welfare Reform Bill for disadvantaged people in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 887/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While the Welfare Reform Bill does not extend to Northern Ireland, under the long established doctrine of "Parity" both I and my officials have been consulting with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions with a view to ensuring that, so far as is appropriate, there will be a

single system of social security throughout the United Kingdom. I have had early discussions with Lord Freud, the Welfare Reform Minister, and I hope to meet him over the course of the summer, to continue the discussion in more detail.

Benefits

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what is the maximum sum of money any one person can receive in benefits at any one time.

(AQW 917/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As Social Security Benefits are paid to an individual based on that individual's particular circumstances it is not possible to indicate what the maximum sum of money anyone can receive in benefits at any one time might be.

Socially Deprived Areas

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development which areas are currently classed as socially deprived.

(AQW 918/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As a Department we target social deprivation at a spatial level using relative rankings from the Multiple Deprivation Measures produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Areas have been identified by the Department for intervention and assistance using a combination of the 2001 and 2005 Multiple Deprivation Measures. The areas identified are: 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, 27 Areas and Risk and 17 Small Pockets of Deprivation located throughout Northern Ireland.

Social Deprivation

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria his Department uses for measuring social deprivation.

(AQW 920/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- 1 The Department uses a range of criteria to identify social deprivation. It is useful to think of poverty as a measure of low income and social exclusion/multiple deprivation as being a broader definition that encapsulates some of the wider causes and consequences of poverty such as; unemployment, low educational qualifications, poor health, and high crime rates etc.
- 2 As a Department, we measure social deprivation at a spatial level using relative rankings from the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM) produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). These measures rank small geographical areas across Northern Ireland in terms of multiple deprivation. Areas have been identified by the Department for intervention and assistance using a combination of the 2001 and 2005 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures. The areas identified are: 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, 27 Areas and Risk and 17 Small Pockets of Deprivation located throughout Northern Ireland.
- 3 We also measure social deprivation at a group level, for example children in poverty. Relative income poverty is defined as the proportion of children living in a household whose income is less than 60% of UK median household income not including housing costs. In other words, child relative income poverty is the proportion or number of children who live in households below the income poverty line in each year.
- 4 Finally, the Department also measures deprivation at an individual level, giving appropriate benefits depending on an individual's circumstance.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting. **(AQW 925/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Since May 2007, as Minister for Social Development I have attended one Plenary North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting on the 10 June 2011. My predecessors, Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood attended seven Plenary NSMC meetings respectively on the following dates: 17 July 2007, 7 February 2008, 23 January 2009, 6 July 2009, 14 December 2009, 5 July 2010 and 21 January 2011.

Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood attended Environment Sectoral meetings of the NSMC on 26 October 2007, 20 March 2009, 30 October 2009 and 5 March 2010. Both my predecessors attended Special European Union Programmes Body Sectoral meetings of the NSMC on 7 November 2007, 17 February 2010 and 13 January 2011. Margaret Ritchie also attended two meeting so the Institutional meetings of the NSMC on 28 April 2009 and 11 November 2009.

Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. This details the matters discussed, the decisions taken and the names of the Ministers who attended from each jurisdiction.

After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies. **(AQW 926/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Since May 2007, the Department has received the following co-operation from Republic of Ireland government Departments.

- Between October 2008 and March 2011, my Department and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) in the Republic of Ireland jointly funded a pilot initiative on Volunteering in Sports, Arts and Faith Based Organisations. DCRGA provided funding of £140,000 and my Department provided funding of £186,022.
- There is ongoing co-operation at the strategic and operational levels between my Department, the Department for Work and Pensions (GB) and the Department of Social Protection in the Republic of Ireland on identifying and investigating benefit fraud with a cross border dimension.
- My Department is the accountable department for Measure 2.1 of the Peace III programme. Projects supported under this measure are co-funded by contributions from the Northern Ireland Executive and the republic of Ireland Government.

The Department has not received co-operation from any republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation.

The funding for the pilot initiative on Volunteering in Sports, Arts and Faith Based Organisations has been confirmed up to 31 March 2012. The contribution from DCRGA in the current financial year will be £70,000. I intend to continue the cross-border co-operation with the Department for Social Protection in the Republic of Ireland to tackle benefit fraud.

If opportunities arise to secure further European Structural Funds money for Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland through new INTERREG V or Peace IV programmes, I will seek co-operation from the relevant authorities in the Republic of Ireland to maximise the benefits to Northern Ireland.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in South Antrim have applied for and received Jobseeker's Allowance in each of the last six months.

(AQW 929/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of successful Jobseeker's Allowance claims in the South Antrim area in each of the last six months.

JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE ON-FLOW IN SOUTH ANTRIM NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY AREA

Month	On-Flow
December 2010	295
January 2011	424
February 2011	395
March 2011	380
April 2011	444
May 2011	301

Transfer of 55 Housing Executive Properties in the Creggan Area of Londonderry

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development whether an Equality Impact Assessment was conducted prior to the transfer of 55 Housing Executive properties in the Creggan area of Londonderry to a Housing Association Multi-Element Improvement pilot scheme.

(AQW 941/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An equality screening exercise was carried out by the Housing Executive in June/July 2010 and this concluded there was no need to undertake a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development who took the decision to transfer 55 Housing Executive properties to a Housing Association Multi-Element Improvement pilot scheme.

(AQW 942/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following their meeting on 30 March 2011, the Board of the Housing Executive approved a transfer proposal for the 55 properties in the Creggan estate to Apex Housing Association and subsequently sought consent of my Department to this transfer under Article 88c of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 (as amended).

This consent was given in a letter of 12 April 2011 and I understand work is already well advanced to give effect to this decision.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development when the Board of the Housing Executive was notified that the transfer 55 Housing Executive properties in the Creggan area of Londonderry to a Housing Association Multi-Element Improvement pilot scheme was being considered.

(AQW 943/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's Board was first presented with a paper on the Rinmore transfer proposal in December 2009

Multi-Element Improvement Pilot Scheme in 2009

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what areas, other than the Creggan area of Londonderry, were considered for the Multi-Element Improvement pilot scheme in 2009; and what selection criteria were applied.

(AQW 944/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot scheme the member is referring to in Creggan is for a small scale stock transfer between the Housing Executive and a Housing Association who will undertake a Multi-Element Improvement Scheme planned for the remaining 55 homes in the area.

Work on this pilot started in April 2009 when the community approached the then Minister for Social Development to see if such a transfer was possible. Community support is essential given that tenants must support such a proposal before any transfer could take place.

This was the first time a community had come forward in this manner and was in effect why they were chosen for this first pilot. With the overwhelming support of tenants in a recent ballot, the transfer will now be completed and if other similar areas may benefit from this sort of transfer I will be more than happy to explore that potential further.

Housing Renovation Schemes

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development what renovation schemes the Housing Executive has planned for Carrickfergus in the next financial year.

(AQW 953/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the following schemes are programmed for Carrickfergus for the 2011/12 financial year.

Location	No. of dwellings	Cost
Carrickfergus External Cyclical Maintenance	162	£367,000
Castlemarra/Longfield/Ederny Kitchen	79	£399,000
Carrickfergus Town/Longfield Heating	68	£464,000

Community Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge over the River Mourne in Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timeframe for the construction and completion of the community pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Mourne in Strabane.

(AQW 967/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The community pedestrian foot and cycle bridge over the River Mourne in Strabane is a Strabane District Council led and managed project which is being part funded by the Department for Social Development. Therefore, the timeframe is the responsibility of Strabane District Council.

However, Strabane District Council has recently appointed a detailed design team and advised the Department that construction is expected to commence in October/November 2011 and be completed by February 2013.

Community-Based Projects in the Strabane District Council Area

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of funding his Department has allocated to community based projects in the Strabane District Council area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 968/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details funding my Department has allocated for community based projects in the Strabane District Council for the last three years.

		2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Revenue				
Strabane Ethnic Comm Assoc	Ethnic Community Development Worker Salary & Running Costs	£ 28,772.66	£ 27,737.13	£ 30,528.85
Lisnafin/Ardnalee CDA	Project Co-ord Salary & Running Costs	£ 23,897.54	£ 25,116.50	£ 25,772.66
Springhill Park CDA	Regeneration Project	£ 49,173.92	£ 47,597.30	£ 48,826.45
Strabane Sigerson's GAA	Project Co-ordinator, Running Costs and Programme Costs	£ 11,899.23	£ -	£ -
Strabane Sigerson's GAA	Project Co-ordinator (08/09 Allocation in respect of	£ 4,570.33	£ 28,582.80	£ 29,274.80
WELB	Youth Intervention & Graffiti Art Prog	£ -	£ 6,754.00	£ -
Strabane Community Project	Salaries Full-time Co-ord & Part-time Finance/Admin	£ -	£ 13,612.16	£ 28,720.80
Melmount EBE Comm Assoc Forum	M.E.B.E.C.A.F. Uniting Communities	£ -	£ 18,174.50	£ 46,565.44
HURT (Have Your Tomorrows)	Support, Treatment & Education Programmes	£ -	£ 5,344.95	£ 15,505.60
Strabane Chamber of Commerce	Christmas Star Campaign	£ -	£ 10,000.00	£ -
Strabane District Council	Sustaining Phys Activity & Improving Wellbeing	£ -	£ 32,768.98	£ -
Fountain St Community Development Association	Head of the Town Rejuvenation Project	£ -	£ 10,322.86	£ 43,261.37
Strabane 2000	Strabane Bridge	£ 97,031.50	£ 5,477.45	£ -
Strabane LGBT Group	Strabane LGBT Inclusion Project	£ -	£ 12,970.15	£ 41,171.79

		2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Strabane & District CAB	Neighbourhood Renewal Benefit Uptake Project	£ -	£ 17,117.32	£ 41,315.36
DRD Roads Service	Environmental Improvement Scheme	£ -	£ 73,025.00	£ -
Foyle Women's Aid	Rapid Response	£ -	£ 1,797.02	£ 21,776.36
NW Play Resource Centre	Learning Through Arts	£ -	£ -	£ 36,463.02
Strabane LSP	Technical Assistance	£ 28,255.60	£ 38,607.99	£ 54,847.37
Strabane Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Formulation of Marketing Strategy for Strabane	£ -	£ -	£ 10,000.00
DSD Housing Division - NIHE	Supply & Installation of Play Equip	£ -	£ 5,609.00	£ -
DRD Roads Service	Environmental Improvement Scheme for Strabane in the Ballycolman & East Ward Neighbourhood Renewal Areas	£ -	£ 158,200.00	£ -
Western Health & Social Care Trust*	Neighbourhood Health Improvement Project (NHIP)	£ -	£ 14,280.80	£ 28,561.80
Cresco Trust **	Strive 2 Work	£ -	£ 8,463.08	£ 8,766.56
DRD Roads Service	Environmental Improvement Scheme (1) for Strabane in North, South & East Ward NR Areas	£ 500,000.00	£ -	£ -
DRD Roads Service	Environmental Improvement Scheme for Strabane in North and East Ward Neighbourhood Renewal Areas	£ 200,000.00	£ -	£ -
	Sub-total	£ 943,600.78	£ 561,558.99	£ 511,358.23
Capital				
Calverts Cross Community Association	Olympic Drive Environmental Improvement Scheme	£ 550.00	£ -	£ -

		2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Strabane District Council	Youth Multi-use Games Area	£ 64,688.10	£ -	£ -
Strabane District Council	Playpark at Springhill Estate	£ -	£ 55,752.00	£ -
Strabane District Council	Melvin Sports Hall Design Development Plan	£ -	£ 54,000.00	£ -
	Sub-total	£ 65,238.10	£109,752.00	£ -
	Total	£ 1,008,838.88	£ 671,310.99	£ 511,358.23

In addition, the Voluntary and Community Unit has provided the funding allocations detailed below, administered through Strabane District Council, for the Strabane Council Area.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Community Support Programme ¹	£214,268	£382,652	£240,987
Local Community Fund	£239,805		
Volunteer Bureau Initiative and Small Grants ²	£148,870	£149,548	£149,548
Total	£602,943	£532,200	£390,535

*&** are both Citywide projects which roll out across the 6 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in the North West. The funding indicated in the table is allocated specifically to the Strabane NRA.

1. Community Support Funding for 2009/10 included £118,405 final year funding to the Local Community Fund. NWDO Neighbourhood Renewal Advice Worker Salaries for 2010/11 and 2011/12 are not included in figures provided.
2. For the Volunteer Bureau Initiative, North West Volunteer Centre which covers the Londonderry and Strabane Area received grant funding during this period. It should be noted that these figures cannot be split with any accuracy between Londonderry and Strabane. Additionally funding through VBI in 2011/12 does not include approximately £40,000 for Small Grants which is pending.

Heating and Maintenance Contracts Awarded by the Housing Executive

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) heating; and (ii) maintenance contracts awarded by the Housing Executive in the last three years; and to detail the process for awarding these contracts.

(AQW 969/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there have been no heating contracts awarded in the last three years. The following maintenance contracts have been awarded within the last three years:

- Response maintenance repairs – Ballymena, Carrick and Larne
- Response maintenance repairs – Bangor and Newtownards
- Response maintenance repairs – Londonderry 1, 2 & 3
- Response maintenance repairs – Antrim
- Tree maintenance – West area
- Tree maintenance – South East area

- Tree maintenance – Belfast
- Tree maintenance – South area
- Void property maintenance – all areas – single contract
- Powered vertical lifts – all areas – single contract
- Major adaptations framework – Belfast
- Major adaptations framework - South
- Major adaptations framework – South East
- Major adaptations framework – West
- Major adaptations framework – North East

The contracts were awarded in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006. The contracts were let by way of the Restricted Procedure commencing with a contract notice in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). The notice was also available on the NIHE website. The notice sought applications from interested parties to be selected to tender for these contracts. Tenders were then issued to successful applicants who in turn submitted tenders.

Co-ownership Tenants

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development why co-ownership tenants have to pay 100 per cent of maintenance costs when they own only 50 per cent of the property and are paying rent on the remaining 50 per cent.

(AQW 1017/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Purchasing a home through Co-Ownership is a form of home ownership, rather than a tenancy. Clients purchasing homes through the Scheme assume full responsibility for the properties. While the term rent is applicable to Co-Ownership purchasers, it is used in a different context to that of a tenancy, properties purchased are legally transferred to the purchaser for use as a private residence, by means of an equity sharing lease. This lease lasts for a period of up to 99 years subject to covenants, including keeping the property in good and substantial repair. It is important to note that the purchaser is the sole beneficiary of any improvements they make to the property.

Capital Investment Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what capital investment projects his Department has planned for the South Antrim constituency over the next four years.

(AQW 1026/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Over the course of the next four years my Department has included capital investment projects in its urban regeneration programme for public realm schemes and the ReStore programme for Antrim, Randalstown, Ballyclare and Glengormley. In addition the Housing Executive has plans for a capital improvement project in Randalstown. Funding for all the projects will be subject to a satisfactory business case and Departmental budget constraints.

Pension Credit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency are currently in receipt of Pension Credit.

(AQW 1048/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of people (and their partners) in each constituency who are in receipt of State Pension Credit at June 2011.

Westminster Parliamentary Constituency	Claimants	Partners	Total Beneficiaries
Belfast East	4,909	949	5,858
Belfast North	7,562	1,523	9,085
Belfast South	4,180	703	4,883
Belfast West	7,183	1,612	8,795
East Antrim	4,115	995	5,110
East Londonderry	5,517	1,510	7,027
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5,522	1,322	6,844
Foyle	6,067	1,576	7,643
Lagan Valley	4,056	880	4,936
Mid Ulster	5,635	1,619	7,254
Newry and Armagh	6,491	1,692	8,183
North Antrim	5,794	1,407	7,201
North Down	3,609	753	4,362
South Antrim	3,859	986	4,845
South Down	5,382	1,492	6,874
Strangford	4,181	1,112	5,293
Upper Bann	6,301	1,697	7,998
West Tyrone	5,842	1,554	7,396
Unknown	1,006	187	1,093
Total	97,211	23,569	120,780

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 1082/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are three neighbourhood renewal areas in the Upper Bann constituency: Brownlow, North Lurgan and North West Portadown. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy in these areas is being progressed in line with the Vision Frameworks and rolling three year rolling action plans which have been drawn up by the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, which include members drawn from the local communities and the key statutory bodies which have an input to the regeneration of the areas.

Window Replacement Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the window replacement schemes that are planned for the North Down area over the next twelve months.

(AQW 1114/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has programmed one scheme for 2011/12 covering Kilcooley, Bloomfield, Rathgill and Loughview in Bangor. This scheme incorporates External Cyclical Maintenance

and window replacement numbering 284 dwellings at an estimated cost of £450,000. However, a survey of the dwellings has yet to be carried out by the Housing Executive and windows will only be replaced if the frames are in poor condition and warrant replacement. The cost of replacing the windows will not be known until the survey is completed and the scheme will only proceed if funding is available.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1115/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In the last 3 years; 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 my Department has allocated £23.5 million, £25.3 million and £25.6 million respectively to the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Clandeboyne Area of Bangor: Home Improvement Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any Housing Executive home improvement schemes planned for the Clandeboyne area of Bangor over the next three years.

(AQW 1168/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have not programmed any home improvement schemes for the Clandeboyne area of Bangor over the next three years.

Moyle: Community Benefit Office

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to introduce a Community Benefit Office in Moyle.

(AQW 1194/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency has recently commenced the roll-out of its Customer First initiative across Northern Ireland with the North District, which includes the Moyle area, being the first District to introduce the new arrangements. Customer First puts in place viable and sustainable service delivery arrangements whilst modernising and improving accessibility of local services without changing the customer journey. Improvements to services have included dedicated "Freephone" telephony services for customers. In this context I can confirm that there are no plans to introduce a Community Benefit Office in Moyle. The Social Security Agency continues to keep its service delivery arrangements under review to ensure that all customers receive a high quality service.

Castleterragh: Parkview Road

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he will take to ensure the proper clean up of the land owned by his Department on Parkview Road, Castleterragh following the eleventh night bonfire.

(AQW 1239/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While the Department owns an area of open space at Parkview Road, Castleterragh, it has not, and has never in the past, authorised its use for a bonfire. However, it is acknowledged that its unauthorised use for this purpose in the past has resulted in an unsightly detritus being left behind, and my Department, working with Strabane District Council and others, has endeavoured to have this removed. Should the situation arise in the future through a recurrence of the unauthorised use of the land, my Department will again arrange for the land to be cleaned up.

It should be noted that the land is currently advertised for sale, and should it be sold prior to the 11th July, its condition will become the responsibility of the purchaser.

East Belfast: Recent Interface Violence

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the allocation of alternative permanent housing to the Housing Executive tenants who were affected by the recent interface violence in East Belfast.

(AQW 1290/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that three people presented as homeless whose circumstances now need to be carefully considered before a homeless decision is made shortly. In the case of a 3-4 bed property being required, Housing Executive staff are trying to identify a suitable property. In the case of a 2 bed property being required, this is more readily available.

Rathlin Island: Postal Signing for Benefits

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will carry out a review of the policy on postal signing for benefits for people who live on Rathlin Island.

(AQW 1307/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no plans to review the postal signing policy for Jobseekers who live on Rathlin Island. Earlier this year, some administrative changes were introduced that circumvent issues for Jobseekers when postal services from Rathlin Island are disrupted and impact on their benefit payments.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Warm Homes Scheme including how many households have benefited from the Scheme in the last twelve months.

(AQO 200/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme is my Department's main programme in tackling fuel poverty. The Warm Homes Scheme continues to be a very successful and popular scheme. In the year ended 31 March 2011 the scheme improved the energy efficiency of 10,381 fuel poor households. I want to ensure that we continue to address fuel poverty effectively and I am prepared to look at other ways of tackling fuel poverty to ensure that targeting of resources is right and that help is getting to those people who need it most.

Town Centre Regeneration: Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Antrim Town Centre Masterplan.

(AQO 201/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Antrim Town Centre masterplan was launched in June 2010. It identifies a range of projects which will regenerate the town centre over the next fifteen years.

A masterplan implementation team made up of the main public and private sector stakeholders in the town and my own Department is working effectively to deliver a number of projects. These include the delivery of an environmental improvement scheme in Railway Street, which was completed in early 2010, and the development of plans for public realm improvements to Market Square, High Street and Church Street which, subject to necessary approval, should start in the first half of 2012. The redevelopment of the large vacant sites in the town centre has also been moved forward. My Department bought the derelict site at the corner of Railway Street and Church Street in May 2010 and is preparing a Development Brief for both that site and the Central Car Park which I hope to issue later this year.

Larne: Riverdale Flats

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development when the work on the partially demolished multi-story flats at Riverdale, Larne will be completed.

(AQO 202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that works on demolishing the flats at Riverdale, Larne is currently being re-tendered subsequent to the previous contractor going into administration.. A list of contractors has been established and subject to an acceptable tender being returned, works to complete the demolition will begin in September 2011. The contract period is 36 weeks with a May 2012 completion date. The Housing Executive is hopeful of an earlier completion date.

Housing: Monkstown

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has for new housing schemes in the Monkstown area.

(AQO 203/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Housing Development Programme is still being finalised and will be published on the Housing Executive website within the coming weeks. (www.nihe.gov.uk)

Town Centre Regeneration: Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any difficulties which are preventing the full implementation of the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan.

(AQO 204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Ballymena Town Centre masterplan, which was published in April 2009, includes 46 actions to be delivered over a 15 to 20 year timescale. . In the first two years, some difficulties in fully implementing the masterplan were encountered, although I am glad to say that these have now been addressed. The difficulties included reluctance on the part of some stakeholders to commit effort and resources to taking forward actions until the Budget 2010 process was completed and there was certainty around the ability of the DSD regeneration budget to fund projects. The town also lacked strategic direction and an effective partnership between the public and private sectors while the Town Centre Partnership was being reformed.

I am happy to say that in the past few months the situation has improved significantly. My Department's budget allocation for urban regeneration for the next four years has reduced the level of uncertainty around funding and we are now moving forward on some key projects. Also, the recent formation of Ballymena Town Centre Development Ltd as a private-public partnership and the appointment of a Town Centre Development Manager will give renewed strategic direction to the implementation of the masterplan.

Child Maintenance

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development why the new system of statutory child maintenance will only be available to new clients.

(AQO 205/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The new statutory child maintenance scheme will be available to existing clients once the new system has been running effectively with new cases for at least a six-month period, thus minimising the risks of implementation and giving existing clients confidence that the new system works well and provides a better service. Only then will cases on existing systems begin to be closed and clients will be given the opportunity and support to make private arrangements or an application to the new statutory maintenance scheme.

Former Girdwood Barracks Site

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to proceed with the proposed development of social housing at the former Girdwood Barracks site.

(AQO 206/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recently visited the Girdwood site and saw for myself the potential it has for this part of North Belfast. However if we are to take forward the development of this site and realise its full potential, this must be done on the basis of a shared and better future and will require cross-community engagement and agreement.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

North/South Parliamentary Forum

Ms Ritchie asked the Assembly Commission what progress has been made in establishing the North/South Parliamentary Forum.

(AQW 880/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Following the North South Parliamentary Forum Conference held at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, Co Down a further joint meeting of the North South Parliamentary Forum Working Groups was held in the Oireachtas on 23 June 2011. At this meeting it was agreed that a further three joint meetings of the two Working Groups would be convened to take forward the ideas and actions generated at the North South Parliamentary Forum Conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2010.

The meetings are planned for the autumn of 2011 and the areas for consideration include:

- Parliamentary Relationships in Europe;
- European Agriculture and Rural Development Reform; and
- The Role and Arrangements for the North South Parliamentary Forum.

It was also agreed that the Report from the Slieve Donard Conference would issue to all Members from both legislatures.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 8 July 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Support Fund

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the reasons for the delay in the allocation of funding to the groups that were successful in the 12 month application window under the Strategic Support Fund.

(AQW 71/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Strategic Support Fund (SSF) is administered by the Community Relations Council (CRC) on behalf of the Department. Groups could choose to apply to one of two application windows for support under the SSF: an 18-month programme of funding beginning 1 October 2010 or a 12-month programme of funding beginning 1 April 2011.

Budget 2011-15 was agreed by the Assembly on 9 March 2011. The close proximity of this agreement to the beginning of the new financial year meant that there was little time to agree and allocate CRC's budget for supporting groups working with victims and survivors before the start of the financial year.

Following notification of its budget for victims and survivors groups, CRC assessed all SSF applications to ensure that expenditure was matched to the available budget in a fair and equitable way. When this exercise was completed, CRC notified the successful groups of their SSF allocations on 22 April 2011. CRC followed this up by issuing Letters of Offer and contractual agreements to the groups during week commencing 9 May 2011.

Travel Costs FOI Request

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why it took until 5 May 2011 to answer a Freedom of Information request received in July 2010 on the travel costs incurred by their Department.

(AQW 115/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The response to the Freedom of Information request in question was under consideration during the time period specified.

Special EU Programmes Body Peace III Phase 2 Funding

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they can ensure that there are no gaps in the Special EU Programmes Body Peace III Phase 2 funding, which ends on 30 June 2011, for the development of community projects.

(AQW 142/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding requirements for the development of community projects were identified by Belfast City Council and the four other lead Councils when they submitted their PEACE III 1.1A Local Cluster Plans to Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). SEUPB has been advised that OFMDFM is content that it progress these applications.

Radio Advertisement in Breach of the Communications Act

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what lessons have been learnt by their Department following OFCOM's ruling that their radio advertisement on the devolution of policing and justice was "political" and in breach of the Communications Act 2003; and what procedures have been put in place to ensure that there are no further breaches.

(AQW 207/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Advertising agencies on the Government Framework have been reminded of the need to secure appropriate approvals and provide written evidence prior to advertisements being broadcast. OFMDFM campaign managers have also been reminded of the need to ensure clearance is received before advertisements are broadcast.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

(AQW 209/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Programme is continuing to be developed following the 3-month consultation which was held last autumn.

We were heartened by the interest, effort and engagement of all those who took part in the consultation and we are considering the report on the analysis of the consultation responses. We want to give the views of all those people proper consideration as we look at how we will build on and strengthen the document.

The five main political parties have agreed to appoint representatives to a working group that will seek consensus on issues that will enable the publication of a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy. That group will consider the consultation responses, and all departments will be asked for their input. All consultation responses will be shared with the working group as well as the OFMDFM Committee. A road map that sets out the steps and timetable for the strategy and a robust action plan will be brought forward. It is anticipated that the strategy and action plan will be ready for the autumn and December respectively.

North/South Ministerial Council

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that they, or their predecessors, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues which were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 987/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since May 2007, we have attended NSMC meetings as detailed in the table below.

Date	Meeting format
17 July 2007	Plenary
30 October 2007	Institutional
17 December 2007 *	Institutional
7 February 2008	Plenary
23 January 2009	Plenary
28 April 2009	Institutional

Date	Meeting format
6 July 2009	Plenary
11 November 2009	Institutional
14 December 2009	Plenary
5 July 2010	Plenary
21 January 2011	Plenary
10 June 2011	Plenary

* Junior Minister Paisley deputised for the First Minister

Following each NSMC meeting, an agreed Joint Communiqué was issued and these detail Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government Ministers that attended and the issues discussed. The outcomes and achievements from each NSMC meeting are discussed at subsequent meetings.

Following each NSMC Plenary and Institutional meeting, the deputy First Minister made a Statement to the Assembly on behalf of all Ministers who attended. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Relatives for Justice

Ms J McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to ensure that Relatives for Justice continues to receive funding for the delivery of victim support programmes. **(AQW 1153/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is committed to delivering the highest level of support and services to victims, and that is evidenced by the amount of funding in that area. We have planned provision of £50 million to meet the needs of victims and survivors over the Budget period 2011-15.

Relatives for Justice is currently receiving funding through the Strategic Support Fund to support the delivery of its programme of services to victims and survivors. The Strategic Support Fund provides the group with funding to meet both its core running and service delivery costs.

Powers of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the decision of the previous Assembly that the remit of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman should be extended to include powers to investigate the further education sector, whether they intend to progress this matter. **(AQW 1289/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In late 2010, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) undertook a public consultation on its proposals to update legislation to reform the Office of the Assembly Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. The consultation sought views on the remit of the Ombudsman, and whether that remit should be extended to follow the public pound.

The Committee for OFMDFM will be taking forward the legislation on the reform of the Ombudsman's Office.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescale for the implementation of the Social Protection Fund. **(AQW 1313/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive proposes a Social Protection Fund that will assist those most in need within the wider community. The Social Protection Fund will target individuals and families facing hardship due to the current economic downturn.

Proposals for disbursing funds will be discussed with Executive colleagues in the coming weeks.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures will be put in place to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of funding from the Social Protection Fund.

(AQW 1314/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is intended that the Social Protection Fund will operate as an Executive Fund therefore we will be working with other departments to identify the most appropriate and effective means of targeting interventions at appropriate families and individuals. Each department that applies for funding from the Social Protection Fund will be responsible for ensuring that it is deployed fairly and equitably within the schemes for which it is secured.

Big Society Funding

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which body or Department will be responsible for the distribution of 'big society' monies.

(AQW 1350/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Cabinet Office will be responsible for allocating Big Society monies to projects that meet its specified criteria.

No decision has been made about the distribution process at this stage.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Capital Investment Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what capital investment projects her Department has planned for the South Antrim constituency over the next four years.

(AQW 1029/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Department will carry out a number of capital investment projects within the South Antrim constituency over the next four years. The current position in respect of planned capital projects is shown on Table 1, below.

Additional capital investments may be funded over the four year period; however, at this stage, commitments have not yet been confirmed.

TABLE 1.
THE CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROJECTS PLANNED FOR THE SOUTH ANTRIM CONSTITUENCY.

Project	Description
Capital Investment: Flood Alleviation	Culvert replacement. Edenduff Cottage, Randalstown
Capital Investment: Flood Alleviation	Culvert replacement: Fourmile Burn, Parkgate
Capital Grants, Axis 1: NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP)	Farm Modernisation Programme: investment in new plant and machinery - 73 projects.
Capital Grants: Axis 1 NIRDP	Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme: investment in specialised slurry spreading equipment - 3 projects.

Project	Description
Capital Grants: Axis 3 NIRD	19 projects covering farm diversification, small business creation and development, tourism activities, improving basic services in rural areas, village renewal projects and conservation of local heritage.
Capital grants: Fisheries Division	European Fisheries Fund: Kilrea Sustainable Development Programme.
Recurrent capital	Replacement of plant, vehicles and machinery at the Greenmount Campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

Local Produce in Supermarkets

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she is doing to promote the growth and sale of local produce in supermarkets over the cheaper alternatives from abroad.

(AQW 1191/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From the outset I want to make clear that State Aid Rules place strict restraints on the use of Government funds to encourage the promotion of local produce, while competition issues are a reserved matter. However, the multiple and independent retailers are major markets for food and drink produced in the north and as such I intend to engage with them to discuss their policies for local sourcing and promotion of local produce.

I am committed to helping farmers develop strong and profitable relationships with their supply chain partners and my Department has been proactively facilitating such communication through various supply chain initiatives. I am also pleased to say that we are currently providing facilitation support to groups of producers exploring market focused initiatives through the Rural Development Programme funded Supply Chain Development Programme.

My Department is also funding a Regional Food Programme which offers financial support to assist eligible groups in the local agri-food industry to develop and expand profitable and sustainable markets. The programme is designed to encourage co-operation across the industry to provide a united front to retailers and consumers. This raising of awareness and empowerment of local groups will hopefully develop and expand all markets for our local produce, including supermarkets.

Additionally, the EU Protected Food Names Scheme provides opportunities for producer groups to protect their product against imitation. My officials have assisted a number of producer groups in developing applications to register local products under this scheme which not only protects products from imitation, but also guarantees provenance to consumers. I would encourage more producer groups to explore whether any opportunities under this scheme, which is free to apply to, could be of benefit to their marketing strategies.

Woodland Cover

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the action her Department is taking to increase woodland.

(AQW 1201/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since November 2010, my Department has continued to encourage new woodland creation through the following actions:

- Highlighting the benefits of creating woodlands by publishing press articles and advisory information aimed at existing landowners. Forest Service has updated its publicity leaflet for all forestry schemes, attended events such as Balmoral Show and gave presentations to groups with an interest in woodland creation.

- Forest Service has held meetings with stakeholders in May and June 2011 to update them on recent developments, discuss further the barriers to woodland creation and future forestry measures for the next rural development programme.
- Claims for a total of 252 hectares of new woodland were processed for payment in 2011. This represents an increase of 18% on the previous year.
- Encouraging the development of partnerships by meeting with bodies with a direct interest in woodland creation such as the Woodland Trust, as well as updating representative groups such as the Ulster Farmers Union on the potential of woodland creation in the context of existing farm businesses.
- Looking at ways in which other DARD land-based grant measures can assist in the promotion of woodland creation. As an initial step, Forest Service has recently updated DARD staff responsible for the delivery of agri-environment grant measures on new woodland creation and the forestry grant schemes currently available to landowners.

Draft Forestry Land By-laws

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact that the restrictions on the hours of access to forestry land, as outlined in her Department's draft Forestry Land Byelaws, will have on the number of people accessing forestry land.

(AQW 1234/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The intended impact of the proposal to restrict access to forestry land to daylight hours is to help address antisocial activity and manage a duty of care to visitors, which is predictably more problematic in hours of darkness.

We are aware that the vast majority to our forests are daytime visitors, but of course we have campers, caravanners, and organised groups who have written permission to be in the forest at night, and this will continue under the proposed Byelaws.

However, I acknowledge there are clearly concerns that the proposed restrictions on night-time access will unfairly affect lower level, casual recreational use of the forests, especially during early evening and early morning hours.

I will consider carefully the range of views and concern around potential impact for visitors of this proposed byelaw, and if it is possible to address these in a balanced and reasonable way, I will certainly do so.

Draft Forestry Land By-laws

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the draft Forestry Land Byelaws, to outline the rationale behind restricting access to forestry land between sunset and sunrise, given that during this time forestry land is used by people for activities such as exercising, astronomy and wildlife watching.

(AQW 1235/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service has proposed daylight access hours to help it deal with antisocial activity and to meet its duty of care obligation to protect forest visitors, which you will appreciate, is more difficult during the hours of darkness. Indeed, night-time closing times are a widespread feature of byelaws for urban and country parks.

Nevertheless, I am aware of the strength of feeling around this proposed byelaw, with the recent ending of the consultation period, and I will consider carefully the range of views. If it is possible to address these concerns in a balanced and reasonable way, I will certainly do so.

Draft Forestry Land By-laws

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of how the proposed limits on cyclists, outlined in her Department's draft Forestry Land Byelaws, will impact on how they use forestry land.

(AQW 1236/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Byelaws propose that cycling will be permitted in designated areas of forestry land, and will be subject to a speed limit of 15 miles per hour (or such speed limit as may be fixed by the Department). As such, they are markedly similar to the Forest Parks and Forest Recreation Byelaws (NI) 1979 currently in operation in forestry land. The scope in the proposed Byelaws to extend the speed limit will be used on designated mountain biking routes.

Another proposed (and commonplace) byelaw prohibits the riding of bicycles in a manner that is unsafe or likely to give reasonable cause for annoyance or alarm to other persons.

Ultimately, in line with our Strategy to Promote the Recreational and Social Use of our forests, we wish to facilitate and indeed expand cycling on forestry land. The proposed byelaws for cycling are intended to manage it in a way that meets our duty of care to all visitors including cyclists; and to raise an awareness of safe cycling and integrate it safely into other leisure activities, be they horse riding, leisurely walking or jogging, as well as timber operations, environmental management etc.

Draft Forestry Land By-laws

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the proposed restriction on access hours to forestry land outlined in her Department's draft Forestry Land Byelaws would be enforced.

(AQW 1237/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Restriction on night-time access is a common feature of city and country parks everywhere; but it is also widely recognised that byelaws can be difficult to enforce, and rely as much upon setting codes and standards and encouraging a sense of responsibility to protect visitors and property alike.

Nevertheless, our intention will be to enforce all the proposed Forestry Byelaws, including that on access, in a measured and reasonable manner.

That said, I acknowledge there are clearly concerns that the proposed restrictions may unfairly affect the enjoyment of casual, responsible use of the forests, especially during early evening and early morning hours in autumn and winter.

I will consider carefully the range of views and concerns around this proposed byelaw, including enforcement practicalities, and if it is possible to address these in a balanced and reasonable way, I will certainly do so.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on mobile phones for members of staff in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) cost of handset; and (ii) billing.

(AQW 1189/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department spent the following amounts on mobile phone handsets and billing in the financial years 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11:

Year	Handset Costs (£)	Billing Costs (£)	Total (£)
2008-09	1,784.16	17,261.65	19,045.81
2009-10	1,366.72	16,843.86	18,210.58
2010-11	810.36	21,108.34	21,918.70

Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras Na Gaeilge: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has allocated to (i) the Ulster-Scots Agency; and (ii) Foras Na Gaeilge, in each year since 1998.

(AQW 1204/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North-South Language Body (which was established in 1999), comprises the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge, and is funded jointly by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.

Both agencies' financial year is based on a calendar year (January-December). The funding allocated by DCAL to the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge since 2000 is set out in the following table for each calendar year.

FUNDING TO ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY AND FORAS NA GAEILGE

Financial Year April to March	DCAL allocation £m	
	Ulster-Scots Agency	Foras na Gaeilge
2000	£ 0.5m	£ 1.80m
2001	£ 0.97m	£ 2.53m
2002	£ 1.07m	£ 2.64m
2003	£ 1.16m	£ 2.85m
2004	£ 1.34m	£ 3.22m
2005	£ 1.36m	£ 3.24m
2006	£ 1.61m	£ 3.49m
2007	£1.44m	£ 3.58m
2008	£ 2.5m	£ 4.1m
2009	£ 2.3m	£ 3.9m
2010	£ 2.2m	£ 3.9m

Derelict Water Application

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a Derelict Water application was submitted to her Department in 1995 for stretches of water on the right bank of the River Mourne and Sion Mills, Strabane, which included Stragullin, Carrygullin Lower and the Trout Hole; and if so, what was the outcome of this application.

(AQW 1265/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has no record of receiving a Derelict Water Application in 1995 for stretches of water on the right bank of the River Mourne and Sion Mills Strabane, which included Stragullin, Carrygullin Lower and the Trout Hole.

However a Derelict Water Application was received in 1992 for the River Mourne which was not completed by the applicant as the derelict water highlighted on the maps attached to the application were not derelict as stated in the application. The Department has not retained the documentation relating to this application as it did not progress.

2010-11 In-Year Monitoring Rounds

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW4960/11, to outline (i) which arm's-length bodies received a share of the £783,000; and (ii) to whom did the arm's-length bodies allocate this money.

(AQW 1270/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pursuant to AQW4960/11, the allocation of the additional £783,000 is as follows:

Value £'000	Allocated To	Description	Third Parties Funded under this programme
260	Sport NI	Funding allocated to Sports Council for the Sports Strategy Implementation programme. (Note: A similar amount had been eased earlier in the year and reallocated elsewhere, but was subsequently needed by Sport NI)	2&4 Wheel Steering Group, 500 Motor Racing Club of Ireland & Nutts Corner Circuit Ltd
117	Libraries NI	Funding allocated to Libraries NI for the purchase of security gates for Falls, Shankill and Whiterock Libraries and for small items of capital equipment and software in libraries.	None
59	Armagh Planetarium	Funding allocated to Armagh Planetarium for the purchase of desk top work stations, repair work, the purchase of book-stock and reprinting of the Border Heritage Book.	None
5	NIMC	Funding allocated to Northern Ireland Museums Council for the upgrade of PCs	None
342	NMNI	Funding allocated to National Museums for the purchase of a Sir John Lavery painting, a counting machine for the Dalchoolin Gallery, signage and to cover unforeseen increased costs in Cultra Manor, New World Development and Security Systems.	None

I do hope you find this information useful.

Trout and Salmon Stocks

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) for her assessment of (a) the state of trout and salmon stocks in the River Maine system; (b) the adequacy of the safeguards which currently exist for the migratory run of salmon and trout; and (c) how the stock levels compare to the levels ten years ago; (ii) how many bailiffs are employed on the River Maine system; (iii) whether the bailiffs operate on a call-out system or on the basis of routine river inspections; and (iv) to compare the number of bailiffs currently employed to the number employed ten years ago and their modus operandi.

(AQW 1304/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Work is in progress to develop appropriate assessment tools for trout and a report is expected in early 2012. The status of adult salmon stocks on the River Maine is measured against a specific conservation limit (CL) for the river. The CL for the River Maine is expressed as the number

of eggs required to seed the available accessible habitat and the annual attainment against CL from 2005-10 is outlined in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. ATTAINMENT OF CL ON THE RIVER MAINE 2005-2010

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
% Attainment of CL	42	96	170	68	61

DCAL works within the guidelines specified under Section 17 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 to safeguard the migratory run of salmon and trout within the Department's jurisdiction. In 2007 the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) took over the responsibility of investigating water pollution incidents and prosecuting offenders under the Water Order. DCAL works closely with the NIEA where a fish kill occurs as result of a pollution incident.

The River Maine has been surveyed annually at over 100 monitoring sites since 2002 and an annual index of recruitment has been generated to monitor trends in abundance over time. The annual fry index for the River Maine catchment is detailed in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. ANNUAL FRY INDEX RIVER MAINE

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
No Fry 5 Min	4.38	9.27	5.17	5.00	3.08	3.59	5.65	4.68	3.41

Three DCAL Fishery Protection Officers (Bailiffs) work in the Northern Area which covers the River Maine system. Fishery Protection Officers operate an On Call system from June to December to respond to reports of illegal fishing activity in the DCAL operational area. In addition, planned patrols are carried out both during the week and at weekends to detect breaches of Fisheries Legislation on the River Maine.

The former Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB) employed 12 Fishery Protection Officers ten years ago covering the North with the exception of the Foyle and Carlingford areas, which are under the jurisdiction of the Loughs Agency. The Fishery Protection Officers worked a rota basis of 6 hours per day for 6 days a week. The former FCB employed 2 Fishery Protection Officers on the River Maine area. DCAL have 3 Fishery Protection Officers appointed to the Northern Area which includes the River Maine catchment area.

2012 Olympics

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what representations her Department has made to ensure that people from Northern Ireland receive an equitable share of tickets for events in the 2012 Olympics.

(AQW 1316/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games has sole responsibility for the ticketing arrangements for London 2012.

Of the 8.8 million tickets for the Olympic Games, 75% (6.6 million) are being made available to residents of England, Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland. The first round of sales was held in March/April 2011 and over-subscribed sessions were balloted. The second round of sales took place in June and were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. There will be further opportunities to purchase tickets up until the Games themselves.

Applications for tickets for the Paralympic Games will be open between 9 September and 30 September 2011 and will follow a similar sales process to the Olympic Games tickets.

There is no quota system, but people from the North of Ireland have an equal chance to apply for tickets to the 2012 Games as those from England, Scotland or Wales.

Through London 2012 Ticketshare, up to 100,000 tickets are being made available free-of-charge to Get Set Network schools and colleges across England, Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland. Schools in the North of Ireland have an equal opportunity to become members of the Get Set Network and avail of these free tickets.

Olympic Torch

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people will be carrying the Olympic Torch on its route through Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1317/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games has advised that there will be 8,000 Torchbearers during the 70-day Torch Relay around England, Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland. Of these, up to 600 will be required in the North of Ireland.

Olympic Torch

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps are being taken to ensure that the selection process for people to carry the Olympic Torch will be conducted in an equitable and fair manner.

(AQW 1318/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) has overall responsibility for the selection of Torchbearers.

Everyone above the age of 12 was able to make nominations, and this was publicised in the North of Ireland by LOCOG and by my Department. LOCOG will create a shortlist of potential Torchbearers through an automated ballot process. Only one nomination per person (selected at random) will be put into the ballot.

The stories of the shortlisted nominees will be put forward to one of 12 panels around England, Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland, who will judge nominees from their area. The stories will remain anonymous as the judges decide which stories have the power to inspire the world.

The make-up of the judging panel in the North of Ireland will be determined through liaison between LOCOG and my Department and judging of nominations will be supervised by LOCOG to ensure that the agreed process is applied consistently in an equitable and fair manner.

The presenting partners in the North of Ireland – Coca-Cola and Samsung – have also been provided with a number of Torchbearer slots and have announced their own nomination systems, which are based on the same guiding principles.

Company Inspector's Investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether any settlements for creditors remain outstanding because of the Company Inspector's investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 1339/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No settlements for creditors remain outstanding because of the Company Inspector's investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company. The process of verifying creditors, and making payment to those creditors which are verified, has properly continued whilst the Company Inspector's investigation is ongoing.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to quantify any contingent liabilities of the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 1340/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Northern Ireland Events Company accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 quote quantifiable contingent liabilities of approximately £33,000. The accounts also make reference to unquantifiable contingent liabilities.

Company Inspector's investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the extent of the PSNI involvement in the Company Inspector's investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 1341/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Company Inspector's investigation is a matter for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I am therefore not in a position to answer the Member's question.

Ulster-Scots Agency

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff are employed by the Ulster-Scots Agency in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1352/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are 13 permanent members of staff and 2 temporary members employed by the Ulster-Scots Agency in its Belfast Office. The Agency also employs 2 full time members of staff in its Raphoe Office in Donegal.

Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras Na Gaeilge

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the community background of staff employed by (i) the Ulster-Scots Agency; and (ii) Foras Na Gaeilge.

(AQW 1353/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no legal requirement for either Foras na Gaeilge or the Ulster-Scots Agency to gather community background information for the staff working in their offices based in the South and as such this information is not available. The breakdown of community background for the staff working in the Belfast offices of both Agencies is shown in the table below:

	Community Background			Total Permanent Staff
	Catholic	Protestant	Other	
Foras na Gaeilge	6	1	0	7
Ulster-Scots Agency	2	12	1	15

Gilford Library

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when she expects to be briefed by the Board of Libraries NI on the future of Gilford Library; (ii) what criteria she will use to determine whether the proposals for the library meet Libraries NI's statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient public library service'; and (iii) how soon after being briefed by the Board is she likely to come to a decision.

(AQW 1364/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) I expect to be briefed by Libraries NI on the outcome of Part 2 of the Strategic Review of the Library estate in October.
- (ii) The criteria used to determine whether the proposals for any library meet Libraries NI's statutory duty are set out in the Policy Framework document 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries'. This is available on the DCAL website.
- (iii) Decisions regarding the future of individual libraries are the responsibility of Libraries NI. In the light of the Board's decision my consideration on whether Libraries NI continues to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service will take place promptly.

Suicide Prevention Strategies.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of how her Department can support suicide prevention strategies.

(AQW 1434/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Evidence suggests that to preserve and boost the positive mental well-being people need to: feel safe in their communities, be engaged with and contributing to their local communities; be participating in meaningful activity; be as active as possible; have social networks; and be aware of the importance of positive mental wellbeing and of seeking help when necessary. The services provided by my Department including Arts, Sports, Waterways and Libraries impact in all these areas and do make a significant contribution to improving the health and mental well-being of all our citizens, thereby helping tackle the very real problems of suicides in our society.

I am fully committed to ensuring that my Department plays a full and pro-active role in taking forward the implementation of the NI Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan – A Shared Vision and the agreed actions arising from the Health Committee's "Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm".

Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has been contacted in the last twelve months by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding funding for the Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup.

(AQW 1526/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the NI Tourist Board sought a meeting last month with officials from my Department and Sport NI to discuss the funding position of the Foyle Cup and Milk Cup. Options were discussed. However, the conclusion of the meeting was that it would not be appropriate or necessary for DCAL to intervene.

Football Grounds: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration is being given to ensure that funding is available for football grounds outside the Premier Division of the Irish League.

(AQW 1535/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the development of sport in the north of Ireland including the distribution of funding. In the last financial year, Sport NI has provided £1,114,567 to association football grounds outside the Premier Division of the Irish League. Furthermore, five association football grounds from outside the Premier Division have been identified as 'preferred bidders' to receive funding under Sport NI's Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme and are presently working through their Project Management Requirements. In the future, there will be potential for association football clubs to benefit from sub-regional development funding. As I have indicated in my response to you under AQW 1536/11-15, this funding has been endorsed by the Executive as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period (2015) and a Strategic Outline Case is currently being developed having regard to strategic needs.

Football

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the provision of funding for capital projects for football grounds other than Windsor Park, Belfast.

(AQW 1536/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: When the Executive endorsed funding to take forward regional stadium development on 10 March 2011 it also endorsed funding of around £36m for association football's strategic stadium needs at the sub-regional level. In doing so the Executive agreed that this should be taken forward as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period (2015).

While this sits outside the developments at regional stadium level which will occur in the current CSR period, I have asked Sport NI, in conjunction with the IFA, to develop a Strategic Outline Case on association football's sub-regional development needs and how those needs can be accommodated, having regard to operational viability, sustainability and affordability. This will then be considered by DFP and if acceptable will form the basis for the production of Outline Business Cases for the various projects within the sub-regional development programme. This will mean that when funding becomes available for this aspect of association football development, preliminary work will already have been carried out enabling a programme of funding to be readily taken forward.

World Police and Fire Games in 2011

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people from Government Departments will be attending the World Police and Fire Games in New York in 2011; (ii) which Departments will be represented; (iii) who will represent them; and (iv) what will be the total cost of the visit.

(AQW 1539/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As Minister with responsibility for the delivery of the 2013 Games it is my intention to travel to New York to attend a number of events at the 2011 Games to assist with the promotion of Belfast as the 2013 Games venue and to experience first hand the extent of the Games.

It has not yet been confirmed which officials from my Department will attend the Games but I will ensure that there are sound business reasons for attendance and that the costs are kept to a minimum.

A paper was tabled at the Executive meeting on 7 July 2011 to allow Executive colleagues to consider attendance at the 2011 New York Games.

It is up to each individual Minister to decide whether they and any of their officials will attend the 2011 Games in New York. Each Department will be responsible for their own costs.

Department of Education

Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent in each of the last five years on providing transport for children with special educational needs whose parents/guardians are eligible to apply for a mobility car on their behalf.

(AQW 830/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information you have requested is not available. The Department for Social Development provides for the Disability Living Allowance and individuals in receipt of the higher rate of the Mobility Component within this allowance can choose, or not, to transfer all or part of it to avail of a vehicle under the Motability Scheme.

The Education and Library Boards cannot, without an infringement of the Data Protection Act, 1998, access information to establish if parents with children who are in receipt of the higher rate of Mobility

Component and have transferred all or part of it to avail of a vehicle are also in receipt of transport assistance for the children under the Home to School Transport Scheme.

Savings Over the Next Four Years

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) to provide an estimate of the savings expected to be made over the next four years by (a) the Education and Library Boards; (b) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (c) the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments; (d) the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards; (e) the Youth Council for Northern Ireland; (f) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; (g) the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and (h) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and (ii) for each organisation whether the savings will be made in front-line services or back office services.

(AQW 1035/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The estimate of savings expected to be made over the next four years, by organisation, are as follows:

Organisation	£000'S			
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
(a) ELBs *	26,350	45,091	47,263	49,434
(b) CCMS	732	1,018	1,018	1,018
(c) CCEA	1,110	1,110	1,110	1,110
(d) Staff Commission	45	45	45	45
(e) Youth Council	75	75	75	75
(f) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	13	26	26	26
(g) GTCNI **	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
(h) NICIE	27	54	54	54

* These figures relate to savings on ELBs Centre Costs including youth

** The savings attributable to the GTCNI are in fact savings to DE rather than the Council as the registration fee will continue to be deducted from teachers' salaries but will no longer be reimbursed by the Department.

The areas in which savings are to be made should be in line with the agreed DE Savings Delivery Plan. My officials are currently working with key stakeholders in developing detailed plans to achieve the savings required and at the same time protect frontline services as far as possible.

Redundancies

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail the number and cost of staff redundancies in (i) the Department of Education; (ii) the Education and Library Boards; (iii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iv) the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments; (v) the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards; (vi) the Youth Council for Northern Ireland; (vii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; (viii) the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and (ix) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

(AQW 1036/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number and cost of redundancies for the last 3 years are as follows:

Organisation	Year	Number of redundancies	Cost
(i) Department of Education	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	Nil	Nil
* (ii) Education and Library Boards	2008/09	233	£4,240,448
	2009/10	229	£3,317,071
	2010/11	479	£18,528,797
*(iii) Council Catholic Maintained Schools	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	2	£167,058
(iv) Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	16	£1,227,935
(v) Staff Commission	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	1	£119,734
(vi) YCNI	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	1	£114,000
(vii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	Nil	Nil
(viii) General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	Nil	Nil
	2010/11	Nil	Nil
(ix) Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education	2008/09	Nil	Nil
	2009/10	1	£43,186
	2010/11	Nil	Nil

* These figures exclude school based redundancies.

Nursery and Preschool Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to address the shortage of nursery and pre-school places in the North Down area.

(AQW 1119/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer you to the response to your earlier Question (AQW 731/11-15 published in the Official Report on 01 July 2011) that outlined the position on the number of pre-school places in North Down.

The SEELB has advised that at the end of stage 2 of the pre-school admissions process on 4 June, six children in the North Down area were unplaced; 4 from Bangor; 1 from Conlig; and 1 from Holywood. At that time there were 17 vacant places in Holywood.

As at 29 June, places are available in Groomsport Playgroup. In addition, the SEELB is currently in discussion with a private provider in the Bangor area with a view to admitting them to the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme by September 2011.

The SEELB continues to monitor the position in the area.

Children Statemented

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the average length of time it takes for a child to be statemented; and (ii) what steps he intends to take to reduce this time.

(AQW 1120/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the education and library boards (ELBs) which are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making special educational provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in their areas. When an ELB decides to make a statutory assessment the timeframe is set out in the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

Boards have 26 weeks to complete a statutory assessment of a child's SEN and to issue, if appropriate, a completed final statement, subject to permitted exceptions.

The Department of Education has set a target in the ELBs' Resource Allocation Plans requiring ELBs to adhere to this timeframe. All ELBs have reported that, subject to permitted exceptions, this target is currently being met.

As the detailed policy proposals from the review of special educational needs and inclusion emerge, informed by the responses received to the consultation exercise on Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for SEN and Inclusion, I will give further consideration to the SEN policy framework in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Councillors Appointed to Education and Library Boards

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of councillors appointed to Education and Library Boards without his, or his predecessor's, prior approval broken down by council.

(AQW 1149/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All councillors who were members of the Education and Library Boards prior to the local government elections in May 2011 were appointed with the prior approval of my predecessor. Following the May elections, all councillor members had to stand down as board members until such time as their nomination was reaffirmed by the Council, and they were re-appointed by the Minister for Education. Since the elections, 15 Councils have confirmed they wish to retain their existing representatives on the relevant Board and all of those appointments were made by me on 23 June 2011. Nomination, selection and appointment processes remain to be completed for a total of six Councils in the Belfast, North Eastern, Southern and Western Education and Library Board areas. The Department is in contact with the relevant Councils and further appointments will be made by me at the appropriate time. All members of the Education and Library Boards are appointed by the Minister for Education.

Office of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment in the North West Teachers' Centre in Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education what is the current rental cost for the office of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment in the North West Teachers' Centre in Derry.

(AQW 1156/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the interim Chief Executive of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment that the current rental cost for an office in the North West Teachers' Centre in Derry is £3,060 per annum.

St Colm's High School, Twinbrook

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for St Colm's High School, Twinbrook; and whether an integrated approach to include the refurbishment of Brook Activity Centre can be considered in any future plans for this new build.

(AQW 1161/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major capital scheme for St Colm's High School is not on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan but is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage in planning that the Department has not yet agreed to fund.

An Economic Appraisal for St Colm's HS was received by the Department in November 2010. This includes an option for a replacement school on an extended site and to redevelop existing council facilities, including the Brook Activity Centre, for use by the school during school hours and by the community out of hours. The Department has provided comments on the appraisal.

However, significant reductions in the capital budgets for Education over the next four years will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I now need to consider how the available funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Also my Department is awaiting the outcome of the Commission for Catholic Education's Post Primary Review which will determine the long term strategic direction for the maintained sector and may impact on a number of proposed major capital schemes, including that for St Colm's High School.

Until this work is completed I cannot provide any indication as to if or when any new schemes might proceed.

3G Pitch for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal for a 3G pitch for St Mary's Christian Brothers Grammar School, Belfast.

(AQW 1163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is not aware of any formal proposal for a 3G pitch for St Mary's Christian Brothers Grammar School, Belfast.

As you know, there are two proposed major schemes for St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, both of which are at Economic Appraisal stage. One scheme is to address the main school provision and the other is in relation to the provision of a sports hall, however, the Department has not yet agreed to fund these projects.

I can confirm that the provision of a 3G pitch is not included within the scope of either scheme.

Nursery School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children were unable to obtain a place at the nursery school of their choice in the North Down area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1172/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the number of children, who were unable to obtain a place at the nursery school (i.e. nursery school, nursery unit or voluntary/private pre-school provider) of their choice in the North Down area in each of the last five years, is as detailed in the table below.

Year	Number of children* unable to obtain a place at the nursery school of their choice
2007/08	23
2008/09	20
2009/10	9
2010/11	47
2011/12**	18

* figures relate to children in their final pre-school year

** as at 27 June 2011

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made with the five key actions outlined in his Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy and the proposed spend related to this Policy for 2011/12.

(AQW 1240/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the policy was launched on 24 March, good progress has been made in preparing for implementation from September 2011. The focus has been on progressing enabling actions including development of guidance and an indicator framework which can be used to baseline and assess progress. A dedicated website (www.CREDNI.org) is under development to support implementation of the policy and disseminate good practice. The guidance, indicator framework and website are expected to be available for new school term in September. Education & Library Boards are leading on the development of a regional training strategy to ensure educators have the skills and experience to deliver curricular requirements relating to community relations, equality and diversity. A joint Youth and Schools Interboard Panel has been established by the Education and Library Boards to oversee implementation of the policy.

The budget for implementation of the policy is £1.1m. Allocations have been made to the five Education and Library Boards and Youth Council NI and at this time full spend is anticipated.

Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what actions under his Department's 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement' are designed to boost the performance of schools in deprived areas.

(AQW 1246/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement sets out our overarching approach to raising standards and tackling underachievement in all our schools. The evidence indicates a strong link between socio-economic factors and educational outcomes, but disadvantage should not be seen as an excuse for underachievement.

The policy reflects the fact that schools themselves, through open and honest self-evaluation, are best placed to identify and implement changes that will bring about improved outcomes for their pupils. It sets out how schools, including those serving deprived areas, will be encouraged and supported in bringing about their own improvement, focusing on action in six priority areas. These are: promoting effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and achievement; delivering high quality teaching and learning; tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face; embedding a culture of self-evaluation and of using performance and other information to effect improvement; supporting school improvement, including through the formal intervention process; and promoting greater engagement between schools, parents and families. It also contains a more detailed action plan. Through robust

implementation of the school improvement policy I believe we will address underachievement wherever it occurs.

At the same time, we are providing additional support for schools that serve some of our more disadvantaged communities, including through programmes such as Extended Schools and Full Service Schools and the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programmes.

Development of Integrated Education

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what engagement he has had with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in relation to the development of integrated education.

(AQW 1247/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have not had any engagement with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in relation to the development of integrated education. However if the Council raise the issue I would be happy to discuss it.

Nursery Provision

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department is taking to monitor the number of children coming to reside in Northern Ireland from other EU countries to ensure that there is adequate nursery provision for all children.

(AQW 1249/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer you to my response to your earlier question – AQW 1085/11-15 in which you asked if statistics on the birth rate are used to determine the number of pre-school places required.

As I indicated in that response, the management of pre-school places is a complex process. DE does not routinely collect data on the number of children coming to reside here from other EU countries.

NISRA is responsible for collating migration statistics that can be used by all Government Departments. The latest statistics available are for 2008/09.

As there is no way of knowing whether these people are still resident here or not, they are of very limited use for planning purposes.

Temporary Variation Enrolment Numbers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many schools have sought permission to have temporary variations in their enrolment numbers in each of the last five years; and to detail the schools which were granted permission.

(AQW 1267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of post-primary schools that have sought permission to have temporary variations in their enrolment numbers in each of the last five years is as follows:

School Year	Number
2006/07	35
2007/08	36
2008/09	37
2009/10	39
2010/11	39

The number of primary schools that have sought permission to have temporary variations in their enrolment numbers in each of the last five years is not held in the format requested and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

The schools that were granted permission to have temporary variations in their enrolment numbers in each of the last five years are detailed below.

SCHOOLS THAT WERE GRANTED A TEMPORARY VARIATION IN THEIR ENROLMENT NUMBER 2006/07 – 2010/11 SCHOOL YEARS

2006/07

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Ashfield Boys' High School | ■ Coleraine High School |
| ■ Belfast Model School for Girls' | ■ Carrickfergus Grammar School |
| ■ Hazelwood Integrated College | ■ Dalriada School |
| ■ Grosvenor Grammar School | ■ Dominican College, Portstewart |
| ■ Belfast Royal Academy | ■ St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt |
| ■ Aquinas Grammar School | ■ St Columbanus College |
| ■ St Patrick's & St Brigid's College, Claudy | ■ Wallace High School |
| ■ St Cecilia's College | ■ Assumption Grammar School |
| ■ Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen | ■ Dromore High School |
| ■ Lumen Christi College | ■ Craigavon Senior High School |
| ■ Ballymoney High School | ■ St Patrick's High School, Keady |
| ■ Ballyclare Secondary School | ■ St Catherine's College, Armagh |
| ■ Dunclug College | ■ St Colman's College, Newry |
| ■ St Colm's High School, Draperstown | ■ The Royal School, Armagh |
| ■ St Paul's College, Kilrea | ■ St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh |
| ■ St Pius X College | ■ St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon |
| ■ Ballyclare High School | |

Information on the primary schools that were granted temporary variations in 2006/07 is not available in the format requested and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

2007/08

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Ashfield Girls' High School | ■ St Colm's High School, Draperstown |
| ■ Ashfield Boys' High School | ■ St Pius X College |
| ■ Little Flower Girls' School | ■ Slemish College |
| ■ St Genevieve's High School | ■ Ballyclare High School |
| ■ Grosvenor Grammar School | ■ Dalriada School |
| ■ Royal Belfast Academical Institution | ■ Rainey Endowed School |
| ■ Aquinas Grammar School | ■ St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt |
| ■ Dean Maguirc College | ■ Glastry College |
| ■ St Cecilia's College | ■ St Columbanus College |
| ■ Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen | ■ Lagan College |
| ■ Loreto Grammar School, Omagh | ■ Assumption Grammar School |
| ■ Lumen Christi College | ■ St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick |
| ■ Ballyclare Secondary School | ■ St Paul's High School, Bessbrook |
| ■ Downshire School | ■ St Catherine's College, Armagh |

- Banbridge Academy
- St Colman's College, Newry
- The Royal School, Armagh
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh
- St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
- Loanends Primary School
- Gracehill Primary School
- Moorfields Primary School
- Kilmoyle Primary School
- Creggan Primary School
- St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt
- St Colmcille's Primary School
- Bunscoil An Chaistil
- Gaelscoil Na Speirini
- Clare Primary School
- Fair Hill Primary School
- Dromintee Primary School
- Carrick Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon
- St Mary's Primary School, Dungannon
- St Mary's Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Primary School, Aghnacloy
- Our Lady & St Mochua's Primary School
- Bunscoil An Iuir
- Phoenix Integrated Primary School

Information on the South-Eastern Education and Library Board, Western Education and Library Board and Belfast Education and Library Board primary schools that were granted temporary variations in 2007/08 is not available in the format requested and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

2008/09

- Ashfield Boys' High School
- Little Flower Girls' School
- St Genevieve's High School
- Hazelwood Integrated College
- Dean Maguirc College
- St Cecilia's College
- Drumragh Integrated College
- Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen
- Strabane Grammar School
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh
- Ballyclare Secondary School
- Dunclug College
- St Colm's High School, Draperstown
- St Paul's College, Kilrea
- St Pius X College
- Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle
- Slemish College
- Cambridge House Grammar School
- Dalriada School
- Dominican College, Portstewart
- St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
- Glastry College
- St Columbanus College
- Priory Integrated College
- Friends' School
- Assumption Grammar School
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick
- Craigavon Senior High School
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- St Catherine's College, Armagh
- Portadown College
- St Colman's College, Newry
- The Royal School, Armagh
- Brownlee Primary School
- Derryboy Primary School
- Dromara Primary School
- Harmony Hill Primary School
- Cumran Primary School
- Ballymacrickett Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Downpatrick
- St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass
- Bangor Central Integrated Primary School
- Millennium Integrated Primary School
- Drumlins Integrated Primary School

- Rowandale Integrated Primary School
- Woodburn Primary School
- Kirkinriola Primary School
- Sunnylands Primary School
- Creggan Primary School
- Millquarter Primary School
- Anahorish Primary School
- St Columba's Primary School, Magherafelt
- St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt
- Braidside Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanaskea
- St Mary's Primary School, Mullymesker
- Broadbridge Primary School
- St John's Primary School, Dernaflaw
- Roe Valley Integrated Primary School
- St Michael's Primary School, Belfast
- Cortamlet Primary School
- Markethill Primary School
- St Oliver's Primary School, Carrickrovaddy
- St Joseph's Primary School, Armagh
- St Mary's Primary School, Barr
- St Mary's Primary School, Dungannon
- St Malachy's Primary School, Camlough
- St Mary's Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Primary School, Aughnacloy
- Our Lady & St Mochua's Primary School
- Bunscoil An Iuir
- Gaelscoil Ui Neill
- Kilbroney Primary School

2009/10

- Ashfield Boys' High School
- Little Flower Girls' School
- Hazelwood Integrated College
- St Dominic's Grammar School, Belfast
- Dean Maguirc College
- St Cecilia's College
- Drumragh Integrated College
- Strabane Grammar School
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh
- Lumen Christi College
- Magherafelt High School
- Ballyclare Secondary School
- Dunclug College
- St Colm's High School, Draperstown
- St Paul's College, Kilrea
- St Pius X College
- Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle
- Slemish College
- Ballyclare High School
- Cambridge House Grammar School
- Ballymena Academy
- Dalriada School
- Rainey Endowed Grammar School
- Glastry College
- St Columbanus College
- Wallace High School
- Assumption Grammar School
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick
- Craigavon Senior High School
- St Catherine's College, Armagh
- Holy Trinity College
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- Portadown College
- St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel
- Abbey Grammar School, Newry
- St Colman's College, Newry
- St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore
- The Royal School, Armagh
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh
- St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
- Londonderry Primary School
- Victoria Primary School
- Bangor Central Integrated Primary School
- St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass

- All Children's Integrated Primary School
- Millennium Integrated Primary School
- Rowandale Integrated Primary School
- Kirkinriola Primary School
- Portrush Primary School
- Damhead Primary School
- Millquarter Primary School
- Spires Integrated Primary School
- Broadbridge Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanaska
- Drumlish Primary School
- St John's Primary School, Dernaflaw
- Omagh Integrated Primary School
- Roe Valley Integrated Primary School
- Ligoniel Primary School
- Dromore Road Primary School
- St Oliver's Primary School, Carrickrovaddy
- St Mary's Primary School, Barr
- St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge
- St Mary's Primary School, Dungannon
- St Mary's Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Primary School, Craigavon
- St Mary's Primary School, Aghnacloy
- St Colman's Primary School, Newry
- Gaelscoil Ui Neill

2010/11

- Ashfield Girl's High School
- Ashfield Boys' High School
- Little Flower Girls' School
- St Genevieve's High School
- St Dominic's Grammar School, Belfast
- St Mary's College, Derry
- Dean Maguirc College
- St Cecilia's College
- Drumragh Integrated College
- Ballyclare Secondary School
- Dunclug College
- St Colm's High School, Draperstown
- St Pius X College
- Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle
- Slemish College
- Ballyclare High School
- Coleraine High School
- Cambridge House Grammar School
- Ballymena Academy
- Dalriada School
- Larne Grammar School
- Dominican College, Portstewart
- St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
- Glastry College
- St Columbanus College
- Priory Integrated College
- Assumption Grammar School
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick
- Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Knock
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- St Patrick's College, Dungannon
- St Catherine's College, Armagh
- Banbridge Academy
- Portadown College
- St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel
- Abbey Grammar School, Newry
- St Colman's College, Newry
- St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore
- The Royal School, Dungannon
- The Royal School, Armagh
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh
- Kilmaine Primary School
- St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor
- Bangor Central Integrated Primary School
- All Children's Integrated Primary School
- Rowandale Integrated Primary School
- Clough Primary School
- Damhead Primary School

- Toreagh Primary School
- Creggan Primary School
- St Columba's Primary School
- St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt
- St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymena
- Gaelscoil Eanna
- Ballycastle Integrated Primary School
- Culmore Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanaska
- St Mary's Primary School, Mullymesker
- Drumlish Primary School
- Belmont Primary School
- Dromore Road Primary School
- Augher Central Primary School
- Bocombra Primary School
- Fair Hill Primary School
- Killyman Primary School
- Holy Cross Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Primary School, Barr
- Roan St Patrick's Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Primary School, Craigavon
- St Mary's Primary School, Newry
- St Colman's Primary School, Newry
- Our Lady & St Mochua's Primary School
- Seagoe Primary School

Preschool Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to increase the number of pre-school places in North Down.

(AQW 1268/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer you to the response to your earlier Question (AQW 731/11-15 published in the Official Report on 01 July 2011) that outlined the position on the number of pre-school places in North Down.

The SEELB has advised that at the end of stage 2 of the pre-school admissions process on 4 June, six children in the North Down area were unplaced; 4 from Bangor; 1 from Conlig; and 1 from Holywood. At that time there were 17 vacant places in Holywood.

As at 29 June, places are available in Groomsport Playgroup. In addition, the SEELB is currently in discussion with a private provider in the Bangor area with a view to admitting them to the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme by September 2011.

The SEELB continues to monitor the position in the area.

Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education (i) what guidelines are in place in relation to the arrangements for transporting pupils with special educational needs from home to school; and (ii) how many pupils with special educational needs avail of this service, broken down by Education and Library Board.

(AQW 1283/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) Education and Library Boards adhere to the following guidelines in relation to arrangements for transporting pupils with special educational needs from home to school.

Pupils are initially assessed for a statement by a Board's Special Education Section who consider their transport needs and make a recommendation. The Boards' Transport Sections then determine a suitable form of transport assistance e.g. which can accommodate escorts, wheelchairs or any other specialist equipment in line with a pupil's needs, taking account of factors such as vehicle loadings and capacities. As Boards are obliged to provide an efficient and economic service, more than one pupil may travel in a vehicle. Where this occurs, Boards

must ensure that the safe carrying capacity of any vehicle used is not exceeded and that it is appropriate for children to travel together. Once the form of transport assistance is determined, the parents are notified.

The number of pupils with statements of special education needs travelling on transport* provided under the home to school transport scheme in 2010/11 was 8,686, broken down by Board as follow:

(ii)

Board	Belfast	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
Number of SEN pupils	1,301	1,687	2,777	1,345	1,576

* Transport includes Translink public and designated services , Education & Library Board buses, private operator buses and taxis

Errors in Examination Papers

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to investigate the causes of the recent errors in examination papers and to prevent a recurrence.

(AQW 1296/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am extremely disappointed at the number of errors in this summer's GCSE and A level examinations. These errors cause real and unnecessary stress to exam candidates and they should not have happened. Pupils, their parents and teachers have a right to expect that the examination papers provided by awarding organisations are carefully checked and error-free.

I recently met with our Qualifications Regulator to receive a briefing on the errors that have occurred in recent weeks and to seek assurance that no candidates will be disadvantaged as a result of any errors. Qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels are developed, delivered and regulated within a three-country framework and the three regulators have now announced that they will be undertaking a full, joint inquiry into the errors and their root causes. They will also demand that all awarding bodies take robust action to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to avoid any recurrence. That inquiry has my support as Minister and I have asked to see the report as soon as the work has been completed. I have also made clear my expectation that it includes a clear focus on ensuring that the interests of pupils will be to the forefront in all examinations.

I understand that this report will also be made public once the Inquiry has concluded.

Preschool Places in Upper Bann

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to increase the number of pre-school places in the Upper Bann area.

(AQW 1378/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that the Upper Bann area comprises Craigavon and Banbridge District Council Areas.

The Board has secured additional funded places to address a shortfall in the Craigavon Borough Council Area through afternoon sessions in two existing voluntary playgroups, both of which were allocated 16 additional places. A new provider was also brought into the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme.

In addition a number of Development Proposals for new or additional Nursery Units at existing primary schools are being studied by the Department.

In the Banbridge District Council Area one new provider was brought into the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme and allocated 15 funded places. Development Proposals are also at consultation stage for new nursery units at two existing primary schools.

St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education (i) what security recommendations were made following the discovery of a viable device in the playground of St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim in September 2010; and (ii) for an update on the implementation of these recommendations and the reasons for any delay.

(AQW 1399/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A review of security measures at the school was undertaken following the incident and it was recommended that the existing CCTV system should be extended to address some blind spots along the perimeter and that "white light" should also be installed to allow the cameras to record from dusk to dawn. Although the existing boundary fence was in good condition it was recommended that this should be extended at the junction of the school and the church car park and that concrete plinths be put in place at the palaside fencing along part of the Gaelic pitch perimeter. A new 1.8 metre high fence and gate was also to be erected at the rear of the school.

The fencing work has already been completed and the CCTV and lighting will be taken forward as a priority scheme in this financial year.

Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what training is provided for teachers to ensure that they can address the specific needs of children who have autism in mainstream schools.

(AQW 1410/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A comprehensive training programme is offered to teachers and other school staff in mainstream schools by education and library board (ELB) autism services and through the Middletown Centre for Autism. The Inter-Board Autism Group has developed an extensive range of training including autism awareness, promoting communication, promoting positive behaviour, sensory issues, transition planning, encouraging social skills and diagnostic group assessments. The Group links with the Middletown Centre for Autism in planning for the provision of specialist training to mainstream schools and in the delivery of training.

In 2010-11 the Middletown Centre offered educational professionals from Northern Ireland 2000 places in over 50 scheduled autism courses. The majority of these are appropriate for teachers working in mainstream schools with a number of courses specifically tailored to meet the needs of these teachers. Examples of these specially tailored courses are:

- autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and mental health and managing anxiety 2 day course;
- ASD and sensory processing 2 day course;
- accommodating students with autism through phases in education 1 day course;
- ASD and overlapping conditions 1 day course;
- supporting students with autism in post primary education;
- TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) and high functioning autism; and
- promoting emotional wellbeing in students with autism.

Use of Precautionary Suspensions

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to outline the timescale for the development of an action plan and guidance for schools in relation to last year's Supreme Court ruling on the use of precautionary suspensions.

(AQW 1422/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A process and guidance will be developed in the broader context of safeguarding children and the management of pupils who engage in behaviour which is harmful to themselves or other

pupils. This requires engagement with the Court Service, PSNI, social services and other agencies with relevant expertise. A change in legislation may be required.

I am unable to provide a definitive timescale, but this work is unlikely to be completed before the 2012/13 business year. In the meantime, guidance and advice is available to schools from the Child Protection Support Service for Schools.

Assaults on Pupils

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last four years, to detail the number of assaults on pupils at (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools by (a) fellow pupils; and (b) teachers or members of staff.

(AQW 1423/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Statistics on the reasons for suspensions and expulsions of pupils are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below shows the number of occasions in each of the last four school years where the main reason for a suspension or expulsion has been classified by the school as a physical attack on another pupil:-

	Primary Pupils		Post-primary Pupils	
	Number of suspensions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of expulsions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of suspensions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of expulsions for physical attack on a pupil
2006/07	83	0	1,624	8
2007/08	100	0	1,545	5
2008/09	83	0	1,511	6
2009/10	105	0	1,495	5

Notes

- 1 These figures relate to all pupils undertaking Key Stage 1-4 in primary and post-primary schools. The figures exclude pupils in special schools and education other than at school.
- 2 The information reflects the number of individual suspensions, as opposed to the number of pupils suspended. Pupils may be suspended more than once.

St Clare's Primary School, Newry

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the condition of St Clare's Primary School, Newry; and (ii) whether he will prioritise a new build for the school.

(AQW 1440/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The fact that St Clare's Primary School is on my Department's current Investment Delivery Plan, is recognition that the school would benefit from a new school build.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects. In view of this, the Department will carefully consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools' estate. Until this work is complete and the way forward for projects confirmed, the Department cannot provide any indication as to if or when the proposed new build for St Clare's Primary School might be possible.

Free School Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education why an exemption to the three mile rule for free school transport is not provided for A Level students, when schools within three miles of their home do not offer courses they wish to study.

(AQW 1472/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schedule 13 paragraph 3(2)(b) of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as substituted by Article 23 of The Education (NI) Order 1997 makes it clear that the purpose of the school transport service is to ensure that parents will always have a school that is accessible to their child. The associated policy is based on access to a suitable school which is defined by four or six categories of primary and post-primary school respectively. Eligibility criteria which covered wider preferences such choice of course would very significantly increase the costs of the scheme at a time when the Department of Education is seeking to realise £5m savings from this budget to contribute to the Departmental Savings Plan. There are no plans, therefore, to extend transport assistance to include subject choice as a criteria for eligibility.

Open Source Software

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what are the estimated savings for his Department of the use of open source software.

(AQW 1483/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Classroom 2000 (C2k) is funded by the Department of Education through the Western Education and Library Board and provides every grant-aided school here with computer equipment, an internal network and a link to a north of Ireland-wide network with access to the internet and e-mail. Schools have access to curricular software on their internal networks and through Learning NI, C2k's on-line virtual learning environment. The service is managed by the suppliers of the equipment and connectivity, so that schools and teachers are not responsible for maintenance and support.

C2k does not hold details on whether individual schools have availed of open source products it is not, therefore, possible for the Department of Education to estimate savings in this area.

However, C2k recognise the potential to maximise the use of Open Source software to deliver learning and teaching services. It is currently seeking to award a contract for managed ICT services and, as part of that process will evaluate bids both technically and commercially to ensure that they meet future educational requirements. The chosen software may include proprietary or open source products, or a combination of both.

After-School Sports Events

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what grants are available for after school sports events.

(AQW 1488/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold records of all the grants available for after-school sports, or of the bodies which make them. Listed below are the main grant sources of which the Department is aware. There will be other grant sources on which the Department has no information.

The Department itself provides annual funding of some £10 million under the Extended Schools (ES) programme, targeted on children and young people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or have the most limited access to current services. Extended Schools resources can be used for a range of activities including after-schools sports programmes.

The Education and Library Boards' Extended Schools Annual Reports for 2009/10 indicated that 20% of programmes (810 out of 4065) funded through the Programme related to additional sporting activities.

The Department also provides funding to the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council for youth work based services, provided by a range of youth units and clubs, which may include sporting activities and programmes.

Sport NI, the lead agency for developing sport in the north of Ireland, has invested around £250,000 under its Awards for Sport 2009/2010 and Sport Matters - Capital and Equipment Programme 2010/2011 in organisations that target after-school clubs and provide youth services. Awards for Sport is a small grants programme developed, funded and administered by Sport NI which aims to increase participation in Sport and Physical Recreation among under-represented groups. The programme is due to open for applications in August 2011 and after-schools sports events will be eligible. Sport NI's Activ8 campaign also offers opportunities for schools to avail of training and resources to support the delivery of physical activity sessions, however, it is not possible to detail how much funding relates specifically to after school sports events. Participating schools are asked to establish development plans to increase participation in sport and/or physical activity within their school, extra curricular clubs and by their pupils within community sports clubs.

Schools may also benefit from non-governmental schemes, for example initiatives by major supermarkets which allow schools to collect vouchers for useful sports equipment, or which offer opportunities for children to participate in sport sessions free of charge.

Entitlement Framework

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to what extent the Entitlement Framework has led to shared classes in schools.

(AQW 1494/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested. The focus of the Entitlement Framework in schools is to ensure pupils have equality of access to an appropriate curriculum, including a range of courses with clear progression pathways, at Key Stage 4 and post-16.

In providing access to a much broader and more balanced range of courses, schools may collaborate to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of pupils. I know that through working in partnership, for example within an Area Learning Community, classes can be shared which benefit pupils' and provide an opportunity for the reduction of duplicate provision in the local area. This can enable schools to reduce their costs and share their expertise and good practice.

All-Ireland Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost associated with his Department's All-Ireland Unit in each year since its establishment.

(AQW 1496/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Two teams within the Equality and all Ireland Directorate, namely; the Equality Team and the Central Support and Co-ordination Team cover a range of responsibilities that include North South matters. The full costs, including staff costs, associated with the two teams in each year since May 2009 are detailed in the table below.

Year	Equality Team	Central Support and Co-ordination Team
May 2009 until 31 March 2010	*£60,063	*£615,560
1 April 2010 until 31 March 2011	*£106,700	*£654,502
1 April 2011 until 31 May 2011	*£14,890	*£148,934

* Costs provided includes the full costs associated with all of the functions carried out by each Team including North South matters.

Preschool Place for a Child of a Student

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether special consideration is applied when the child of a student, who is in receipt of a bursary which is less than would be received in benefits, is being considered for a pre-school place.

(AQW 1525/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In determining the admissions criteria, the Department of Education (DE) specifies 2 priorities i.e.

- social disadvantage – because research has shown that those children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience more difficulty at school than other children; and
- 4yearolds with July and August birthdays – because these children do not enter compulsory education until after their 5th birthday.

This targeting process, which is part of DE's wider strategy to reduce levels of educational underachievement in the long-term, has been in operation since the 1999/2000 school year.

Social disadvantage for the purpose of priority in the admissions process is defined, in the Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations (NI) 1999 (SR 1999 No 419), as a child whose parent is in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseekers Allowance. No consideration is given to other benefits or circumstances in the application of this criterion.

Terms of Reference for a review of the procedures for admission to pre-school places are being finalised and work on the Review will commence shortly.

Preschool Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school places were available in each nursery in North Down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1534/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of pre-school places available in each nursery in North Down in each of the last five years is as detailed in the tables below. Constituency boundaries changed in 2009/10, so the new boundaries are used from that year onwards.

VOLUNTARY/PRIVATE PRE-SCHOOL PROVIDERS

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/9	2007/8
Bangor West Nursery Playgroup	26	20	19	19	19
Bo-Peep Corner Pre-School Playgroup	26	18	14	18	19
St Comgall's Pre-School Education Centre	24	24	15	24	24
Ballycrochan Playgroup	38	26	26	26	29
Chuckles Playgroup	22	20	19	16	14
Ballyholme Presbyterian Church Playgroup	25	25	24	23	24
Tiddli-winks Playgroup	24	25	24	24	24
Redburn Community Playgroup	24	14	13	15	13

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/9	2007/8
Bangor Abbey Pre-School Centre	26	16	14	14	13
Crawfordsburn Playgroup	18	19	15	15	14
Tiggers Palace Day Nursery	30	24	29	17	19
Groomsport Playgroup	26	26	11	12	9
Little Acorns Pre-School Playgroup	33	32	31	32	34
Early Days Playgroup	24	24	24	24	24
Glencraig Integrated Playgroup	26	24	26	18	24
Bright Sparks Pre-School	-	24	-	-	-
Country Kids Day Nursery	20	19	-	-	-

Source: South Eastern Education and Library Board / School Census

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the places allocated to voluntary / private pre-school providers for 2011/12 may be subject to change. Where a place is not taken up with a particular provider that place may be reallocated to another provider. Figures from 2007-2010 relate to the uptake of places as at October of each year not the allocation of funded places which could initially have been higher or lower. The final figure for 2011/12 will not be established until late September / early October when children commence pre-school. It is not anticipated that these allocations will change significantly.

NURSERY SCHOOLS / NURSERY UNITS

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/9	2007/8
Bangor Central Nursery School	78	78	78	78	78
Hollywood Nursery School	52	52	52	52	52
Trinity Nursery School	52	52	52	52	52
Millisle Primary School	26	26	26	26	26
Donaghadee Primary School	52	52	52	52	52
Kilcooley Primary School	26	26	26	26	26
St Malachy's Primary School	52	52	52	52	52
Bloomfield Primary School	52	52	52	52	52
Towerview Primary School	52	52	52	52	52
Rathmore Primary School	52	52	52	52	52
Kilmaine Primary School	52	52	52	52	52

Source: School Census

School Capital Building Projects

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, in light of the budgetary cuts he has had to make, when a final revised list of school capital building projects will be produced.

(AQW 1540/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am not currently in a position to indicate which major capital investment projects will be taken forward. My Department is faced with significant reductions in the capital budget available over the next four years and this will impact on the ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will be considering how to make best use of the scarce resources available for capital investment in the education sector. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months and I will make a statement in the Autumn to the Assembly on the way forward when I have considered the options.

With the severe financial constraints on the capital budget, I am afraid that many schools may be disappointed. There are many deserving projects that I simply will not be able to afford to take forward.

School Maintenance Projects

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education in light of the budgetary cuts he has had to make, when he expects to produce a final list of school maintenance projects.

(AQW 1541/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools' maintenance backlog is currently estimated at £306m and is an area of growing concern for the Department and the Education and Library Boards which determine the priorities for maintenance across the estate.

I recognise that the budget cuts imposed by the British Government have meant difficult choices must be made as money spent on maintenance will be money not available for other frontline services. The budget is not sufficient to cover everything we would wish to do, or indeed believe we should do.

At the moment the Boards are prioritising their efforts on response maintenance only and planned maintenance will only be undertaken as and when they have the resources to carry this out. As such I am not in a position to provide you with a list of school maintenance projects.

The Department will continue to bid for additional funds for maintenance but recognises that there are limited additional funds available across the Executive's budget.

Vocational and Academic Routes in Education

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what steps he will take to guarantee parity of esteem and parity of investment between vocational and academic routes in education.

(AQW 1543/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring that our young people have access to a wide range of relevant and engaging courses that meet their needs and that also reflect and respond to the needs of our economy. I will continue to engage with Ministerial colleagues, business leaders and practitioners in our schools to ensure that vocational and academic routes are available to our young people, and that they are equally valued in relation to progression to Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment. My focus is on ensuring that our young people have an appropriate range of opportunities, across all routes, to develop the skills, creativity and flexibility they need to become the employees, employers and entrepreneurs of the future.

I have already held a meeting with my Ministerial colleague in the Department for Employment and Learning, as our Departments continue to work together to ensure young people in the 14-19 age group have access to a coherent provision of vocational and academic education and training, supported by high quality Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance.

The Entitlement Framework policy clearly sets out the expectation that young people must have equality of access to a minimum number of vocational (applied) and academic (general) courses. Through working with other schools, Further Education Colleges and Training Organisations in Area Learning Communities, schools can offer our young people access to a wider range of appropriate courses, opening up more vocational routes. The funding which my Department has provided to support schools in broadening their curriculum at Key Stage 4 and post-16 has been targeted at enabling parity of provision and esteem for vocational courses, with specific funding available for the delivery of new vocational (applied) courses.

Department for Employment and Learning

Bookshop at Queen's University Belfast

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether the Bookshop at Queen's University Belfast is to be closed as part of the University's austerity measures; (ii) how many people are currently employed at the Bookshop; and (iii) for his assessment of whether the University has a sound business case for its closure.

(AQW 999/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department provides funding to Queen's University for the purposes of teaching and learning, plus research. The University is an autonomous institution and I understand that the Bookshop is a private enterprise. While I directly appreciate the role played by the Bookshop over the past decades and the sense of loss felt by many, the provision of a bookshop at the University is solely a matter for that institution.

Capital Investment Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what capital investment projects his Department has planned for the South Antrim constituency over the next four years.

(AQW 1028/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has had no applications for capital investment projects in the South Antrim constituency and there is no planned capital investment in the area over the next four years.

Merger of Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assurances his Department has received or secured on the maintenance of ethos if the proposed merger of Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College proceeds.

(AQW 1050/11-15)

Dr Farry: The issue of the maintenance of the ethos has been discussed with Queen's University and key stakeholders such as the Transferor Representatives' Council. The University has given an undertaking that the merged School will prepare teachers to deliver the agreed Religious Education curriculum for primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Queen's is also committed to the establishment of a Strategic Stakeholders' Forum which will advise the new School on a range of matters relating to teacher education. The proceedings of the Forum will be made available to the professional accrediting bodies in teacher education including the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and the Education and Training Inspectorate. Members of the Forum will be invited to meet with assessors during accreditation visits.

Specific recognition of the ethos of the Controlled Sector will be achieved through the composition of the Strategic Stakeholders' Forum. All stakeholders in the Controlled Sector will be represented on the Forum. This includes all of the main churches and representation from each of the various school sectors within Northern Ireland. This compares to the current situation at Stranmillis University College where there is no representation from any of the churches on the Governing Body nor is there any

legislative right to such representation. The legislation that will enable the discontinuance Stranmillis and effect the merger will require the creation of such a forum.

University of Ulster's Magee Campus

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether alternative sites are being considered for the expansion of the University of Ulster's Magee Campus, other than the existing Folye and Londonderry College site.

(AQW 1111/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has advised that whilst some expansion can take place on its current site, the University's preferred site for expansion beyond the current site remains the Foyle and Londonderry College site. No other sites are currently being considered.

Consultancy Earnings at University of Ulster

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 656/11-15, to detail (i) the percentage of consultancy earnings which are shared with the University of Ulster; (ii) the total amount shared in the 2009/10 academic year; (iii) whether other full-time lecturers earn income from outside sources which is not shared with the University of Ulster; (iv) whether income earned by serving on Quangos is shared; and (v) whether Queen's University, Belfast, will be asked to collate such information on full-time senior lecturers.

(AQW 1116/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am advised by the relevant institution that;

- (i) 23% of net consultancy earnings are currently shared with the University of Ulster. This will rise to 28.6% in the 2011/12 academic year.
- (ii) In the 2009/10 academic year, £350,484 of consultancy earnings were accrued to the University of Ulster.
- (iii) Some staff may undertake private consultancy in a personal capacity but such activity is not supported or approved by the University of Ulster.
- (iv) Income earned by serving on Quangos is not shared with the University of Ulster. However, any member of staff who takes a permanent position with a Quango is required to take unpaid leave for the duration of the appointment with the Quango.
- (v) Queen's University collects and reports data to a number of statutory bodies including, for example, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). It is not required to collate information in relation to additional income earned by staff, including senior lecturers, from non-University related activities.

The University advises that it operates an approved consultancy scheme which is fully in line with similar schemes in other UK Universities. The University goes on to highlight that consultancy informs academic staff of societal, business related and economic challenges. Consultancy activity is a significant measure of social and economic impact with its importance further emphasised in the new Research Excellence Framework. It facilitates closer links with business and policy makers, and can be an important enabler to unlock opportunities for further research collaborations and investment in the region.

I am advised that 25% of the net consultancy income generated, after recovering all direct costs and an administrative overhead, is retained by the University.

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of students currently attending St Mary's University College, Belfast, come from a Protestant background.

(AQW 1122/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2009/10 academic year, of the Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at St Mary's University College, Belfast, whose religious background was known, 1% were from a Protestant background.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- (1) The latest available data are for 2009/10.
- (2) Information on religion is only collected for Northern Ireland domiciled students.
- (3) Although religious affiliation is not a mandatory question, the response rate in 2009/10 at St Mary's University College, Belfast was 98%.

Board of Governors of St Mary's University College, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the representatives on the Board of Governors of St Mary's University College, Belfast, from (i) the Catholic Church; and (ii) the Protestant Churches.

(AQW 1123/11-15)

Dr Farry: St Mary's University College has advised that:

- (i) the following members of the College's Board of Governors are from the Catholic Church:
 - The Bishop of Down and Connor - The Most Rev Dr Noel Treanor DD (Chairman)
 - One of his Vicar Generals - The Most Rev Donal McKeown DD (Vice Chairman)
 - Irish Regional Vicar, Cabra Dominicans - Sr Lucina Montague OP

Six Governors nominated by the Trustees of the College in consultation with the Roman Catholic Bishops of each Diocese

- Archdiocese of Armagh - Position currently vacant
- Dioceses of Clogher / Kilmore - Mrs Joan Hart
- Diocese of Derry - Mr Gerard Rainey
- Diocese of Down and Connor - Mr Charles MacCreanor
- Diocese of Down and Connor - Mr John F Brady
- Diocese of Dromore - Ms Rosemary Connolly

- (ii) There are no representatives on the Board of Governors from the Protestant Churches.

People in West Tyrone Not in Education, Employment or Training

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people in West Tyrone are not in education, employment or training; and what plans his Department proposes to meet their needs.

(AQW 1129/11-15)

Dr Farry: Northern Ireland does not have a comprehensive data source on those young people Not in Employment, Full time Education or Training (NEET). Estimates are derived from a sample survey for Northern Ireland overall, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and it is not possible to disaggregate the figures further. The most recent LFS data on the numbers of young people aged 16 to 19 estimate that there are 19,000 young people not in education, employment or training in Northern Ireland overall and 47,000 in the 16-24 age group. Another source of information is Claimant count figures, that is those claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). Figures for the West Tyrone parliamentary constituency for May 2011 show that with 895 claimants, and ranking from lowest to highest numbers for those aged 24 and under, West Tyrone is ranked equal 9th. For long-term unemployed aged 24 and under, (those unemployed and claiming JSA for 12 months or more), it is ranked equal 3rd.

My Department is leading, on behalf of the Executive, the development of the key cross-departmental strategy to tackle the issue of those young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Consultation on the draft strategy, "Pathways to Success", closed on 30 June. Following the consultation process the final draft strategy will be submitted to the NI Executive for endorsement and subsequent to this, it is intended to publish the strategy and action plan.

Higher Education Places

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many higher education places are currently provided in (i) the Omagh Campus of the South West College; and (ii) the Strabane Campus of the North West College; and whether plans have been made to increase the number of places over the next four years.

(AQW 1132/11-15)

Dr Farry: South West College has allocated 130 full-time higher education places to Omagh Campus for academic year 2010/11. The College plans to increase this allocation to 154 places in academic year 2011/12 and would intend to grow further the number of places in the Omagh Campus over the next few years. The college also has 592 enrolments in part time higher education courses.

There are currently no higher education places at the Strabane Campus of North West Regional College. The College has attempted, without success, to grow demand for part-time higher education at the campus before considering an allocation of full-time places.

It is the responsibility of each individual college to manage its higher education funding allocations in line with local priorities, as well as the priorities set by my Department. However, decisions relating to the management of courses and the allocation of student places across the college's campuses are matters for the senior management of the regional college and not for my Department.

North/South Ministerial Council Meetings

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 1135/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since May 2007, the Minister for Employment and Learning has attended the following NSMC meetings:

- 17th July 2007 (Plenary)
- 20th May 2009 (Education Sectoral)
- 25th November 2009 (Education Sectoral)
- 14th December 2009 (Plenary)
- 23rd June 2010 (Education Sectoral)
- 5th July 2010 (Plenary)
- 12th November 2010 (Trade Sectoral)
- 21st January 2011 (Plenary)
- 10th June 2011 (Plenary)

Following each NSMC meeting, an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 1136/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from a Republic of Ireland Government Department or its agencies are listed in Annex A which has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website. There were no schemes which received co-operation from any Republic of Ireland nongovernmental organisation.

Regarding future plans, whilst there are no specific additional schemes in the pipeline, my Department will continue to liaise with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland across the range of our responsibilities.

DEL: Procurement

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to procurement by his Department, (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1187/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information on the four occasions in which a supplier has been secured through a single tender by the Department since May 2007, which did not have the advance authorisation of the Accounting Officer, is provided below.

SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS WITHOUT ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BY THE ACCOUNTING OFFICER

(i) Reason for no advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer	(ii) Level of Expenditure	(iii) Name of supplier	(iv) Date of Retrospective Approval
The Department's funding of this organisation was inherited from the five Education and Library Boards, following devolution in 1998. Following a recommendation by the Department's Internal Audit team that the relationship should be put on a contractual basis, retrospective approval for Single Tender Action was sought on two occasions to cover the period 1 April 2008 to 31 July 2009 (to coincide with the end of the academic year).	£33,334	Skill NI	29/01/09 & 02/09/09
The decision not to go to open tender was based on the fact that neither Disablement Advisory Service nor Central Procurement Directorate were aware of any other organisation or individual who could deliver the required service; and on the relatively low spend associated with the contract.	£11,386	Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)	25/05/10

(i) Reason for no advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer	(ii) Level of Expenditure	(iii) Name of supplier	(iv) Date of Retrospective Approval
It was decided that the Department should work towards ISO/IEC 27001 certification. At that time, the British Standards Institute (BSI) was identified as the provider of the required ISO/IEC 27001 service. When it was found that this constituted a single tender action retrospective approval was requested. To engage an alternative organisation at that stage would have required the Department to duplicate the certification process which would have resulted in higher costs.	£14,868	British Standards Institute	9/05/11
The catering contract for Adelaide House was secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer on 3 occasions from May 2007. The original contract was awarded on 1 January 2002 following tender and was originally to run for 3 years (ending 31 December 2004) with the option to extend annually for a further 2 years (31 December 2006). In January 2006 Central Procurement Directorate advised the Department that the catering contract would be extended in stages to accommodate the Work Place (WP) 2010 timetable. The Department first became aware, through Central Procurement Directorate, that this arrangement would be viewed as a single tender action in September 2010. The existing catering contract has now been extended until 30 September 2011 to allow sufficient time to re-tender.	£125,000	Mount Charles	9/11/10

Efficiency Savings of Universities and Further Education Colleges

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 663/11-15, in light of efficiency savings, how much he expects (i) universities; and (ii) further education colleges to save over the next four years.

(AQW 1228/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have made it clear that my Department's balanced budget for the four years to 2014/15 is predicated on the assumption that there would be an increase in Student Tuition fees from 2012/13. Once Executive and Assembly agreement has been reached on the way forward for student tuition fees I will then be in a position to finalise the Savings Delivery Plans for the three years to 2014/15.

Under current plans, the Universities will have to find a 12% operational saving, which equates to £28m per annum by 2014/15 and the Further Education colleges are being asked to find £6.5m in 11-12 and £4m per annum thereafter. This is in addition to efficiencies of some 20% delivered over the last few years.

Bursaries: Masters Degree

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what bursaries are available for people who wish to study for a masters degree in the 2011/12 academic year.

(AQW 1229/11-15)

Dr Farry: Support for postgraduate students, many of whom have already had the benefit of my Department's student support for their primary degree, has always been discretionary and subject to change to reflect wider government priorities.

Each year my Department, through its Postgraduate Awards scheme, makes available student support funding to Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster for research and certain approved courses of full-time study leading to higher degrees (Masters and PhDs). The universities are responsible for administering the Postgraduate Awards scheme and select, by competition, the students to fill these awards within the limits of funding available.

For academic year 2011/12, eligible students who are successful in securing a postgraduate award for a taught masters course will receive a minimum grant for personal maintenance of £6,795 (provided they satisfy the residency requirements of the scheme) and they will have their tuition fees paid.

Alternative sources of funding that postgraduate students may be able to avail of include a Professional and Career Development Loan, an interest subsidised bank loan which is designed to help people pay for work-related learning to help gain experience, training and qualifications to improve job skills or launch a new career; or a grant from the Educational Grants Advisory Service. Postgraduate students who are in financial hardship or are contemplating leaving their course because of financial problems may be able to seek assistance from their university's Support Funds.

North West Regional College's Strabane Campus

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what priority he attaches to funding for a new build for North West Regional College's Strabane Campus, given that the economic appraisal for the new build has been with his Department for consideration and funding since June 2006.

(AQW 1251/11-15)

Dr Farry: The renewal of the North West Regional College's Strabane campus is a priority for my Department and was included in the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland 2005 to 2015 which highlighted a need for funding in 2012. A bid for capital to fund renewal of the Strabane campus was made in Budget 2010 but this bid was not met. I will continue to keep Strabane amongst my priorities and will be including the need for funding for Strabane in the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland 2011 to 2021, due later this year.

Funded Learning Units

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Funded Learning Units have been allocated to each further education college in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1275/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of Funded Learning Units allocated annually in relation to recurrent block grant funding for each Further Education College since the 2007/08 academic year is detailed in the table below.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast Metropolitan College	7,855	10,177	10,473	10,139	9,774
North West Regional College	5,453	6,667	6,874	7,147	6,593
Northern Regional College	5,800	6,415	6,315	6,493	6,199
South Eastern Regional College	5,620	6,410	7,125	7,469	7,107

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
South West College	4,441	4,566	4,416	4,747	4,710
Southern Regional College	6,121	7,294	7,518	8,268	7,675

Note: 2007/08 does not include Higher Education provision delivered within FE, which was only funded through the FLU model from 2008/09.

Further Education Colleges: Funding

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funding allocated to each further education college for the (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12 academic years.

(AQW 1276/11-15)

Dr Farry: Recurrent block funding to the six Further Education (FE) Colleges is allocated on an academic year basis through the Further Education funding model and allocations are made in line with Departmental priorities. The block grant provides funding to enable the FE Colleges to deliver mainstream FE provision up to and including level 3, Essential Skills provision and Higher Education provision delivered within FE. The table below details the funding allocated to the six Further Education Colleges for the 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years.

College	2010/11 Allocation	2011/12 Allocation
Belfast Metropolitan College	34,424,765	33,230,416
North West Regional College	23,297,739	22,417,139
Northern Regional College	22,026,775	21,076,921
South Eastern Regional College	25,323,564	24,165,270
South West College	16,105,037	16,014,901
South Regional College	27,022,120	26,096,041
Total	148,200,000	143,000,688

Alleged Falsification of Registers at the South Eastern Regional College

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers' investigation into the alleged falsification of registers at the South Eastern Regional College.

(AQW 1280/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Governing Body of the South Eastern Regional College has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), as the internal audit service for the college, to independently validate an internal review by the college into a recent whistleblowing episode. My Department expects to receive a copy of the PWC investigation report in due course.

Research Involving Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has allocated to research involving animals in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1288/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department allocates research funding to the higher education institutions on an annual basis. The majority of recurrent research funding is allocated by reference to quality, as assessed by performance in the most recent (2008) Research Assessment Exercise, which measured the distribution of research quality across given Units of Assessment. This is known as Quality-related

Research (QR) Funding and is used to cover the essential costs necessary to carry out research. QR is paid as a block grant to the universities and distributed by them according to their own strategic priorities.

My Department also provides other small amounts of research funding for specific initiatives. None of these has involved animals in the last three years.

Full-time Equivalent Student Count in Further Education Colleges

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the full-time equivalent student count for each further education college in the (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; (iii) 2009/10; and (iv) 2010/11 academic years.

(AQW 1293/11-15)

Dr Farry: The figures requested for the 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years are set out in the table below.

College	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Belfast Metropolitan College	9098.59	9978.71	9803.49
Northern Regional College	6027.11	6120.86	6003.33
North West Regional College	5604.56	5717.43	6421.76
South Eastern regional College	7176.22	6394.26	7680.85
Southern Regional College	7109.64	6993.55	8002.52
South West College	4949.42	4629.99	4943.10

Information relating to the current academic year (2011/12) is not yet available.

Education Groups in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the education groups in the North Down area which are currently funded by the South Eastern Regional College.

(AQW 1369/11-15)

Dr Farry: South Eastern Regional College has advised that it does not fund any education groups in the North Down area.

Capital Projects for North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1384/11-15)

Dr Farry: The only funding application received from the North Down Constituency was from the South Eastern Regional College. The College applied for funding for a new performing arts centre in Bangor and the Department bid for this project in Budget 2010. The bid was not met so there are currently no plans for capital projects in the North Down constituency.

Land in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to sell land in the North Down area that is owned by his Department.

(AQW 1449/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not own any land in the North Down area.

Unemployed People in the Mid-Ulster Area

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps have been taken to address the increasing number of unemployed people in the Mid-Ulster area.

(AQW 1501/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department provides a comprehensive range of services and programmes to help people find and sustain employment. These are, job search and work-focused interviews provided by my frontline staff and employment programmes which are provided by external contractors including Steps to Work, which is the main adult return to work programme.

Between April 2010 and May 2011, 2119 unemployed people in the Mid-Ulster area have been helped into work.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

InterTradelreland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding her Department has allocated to InterTradelreland in each year since 1998.

(AQW 764/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment began funding InterTradelreland in the financial year 1999/00. The table below details expenditure in each financial year thereafter (all figures are in £000's).

99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
0200	494	1,899	1,088	2,103	2,548	2,685	3,400	3,337	3,213	3,594	3,483

DETI: Procurement

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to procurement by her Department (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1118/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The requirement to secure Accounting Officer approval for all single tender actions was formalised in June 2010.

Nil return for 2010-11.

Information for prior years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Invest NI: Resources in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide a breakdown of the resources, including financial resources, allocated to the West Belfast constituency by Invest NI in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 1140/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI supports a range of new businesses, existing businesses and Foreign Direct Investment projects in the West Belfast Constituency.

In the last two financial years, total Invest NI assistance in the West Belfast Constituency was £4.08million. A total of £3.17million was provided to locally owned businesses, with an associated investment figure of £9.37million.

Alongside support to indigenous businesses in West Belfast, Invest NI offered £906,747 of assistance to Foreign Direct Investment projects, in support of local jobs and resulting in £4.4million of planned investment in West Belfast.

Details of total support provided for the last two financial years are shown in the table below.

INVEST NI ASSISTANCE AND INVESTMENT IN WEST BELFAST PCA (09-10 - 10-11) - BY OWNERSHIP

Financial Year	External			Local			Total		
	No Of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment	No Of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment	No Of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment
2009 -10	10	0.9044	4.4266	87	2.8172	8.1993	97	3.7216	12.6259
2010 -11	4	0.0024	0.0024	70	0.3551	1.1665	74	0.3575	1.1689
Grant total	14	0.9067	4.4290	157	3.1723	9.3659	171	4.0790	13.7948

In addition to direct financial support, Invest NI supports businesses in West Belfast through a range of initiatives and programmes, including the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) and the Social Entrepreneurship programme (SEP). This support has resulted in the following number of new starts in the Constituency, over the last two financial years.

NEW STARTS IN WEST BELFAST PCA

Financial Year		Total
2009-2010	105	105
2010-2011	129	131
Total	234	236

In the development and management of industrial land and property Invest NI has spent in excess of £1.2m over the last two years. The breakdown by year is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	Expenditure (£000's)
2009-2010	586
2010-2011	659

In addition, Property Solutions Unit has carried out 19 property searches that include West Belfast options for prospective investors. Invest NI personnel have dealt in person with forty-one property management issues in connection with its property holding in the constituency.

Financial Year	Number of Property Searches	Responses to property management issues
2009-2010	14	17
2010-2011	5	24

Invest NI: Job Creation in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans Invest NI has to create job opportunities in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1141/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI continues to focus on increasing the size, competitiveness and value of our private sector, including those businesses located within the West Belfast constituency area, by embedding innovation, growing our local companies to scale, encouraging and cultivating business starts, increasing our export base and attracting inward investment to develop employment opportunities for our community. In West Belfast, Invest NI continues to support the creation of jobs through the delivery of a range of programmes and initiatives including the new Business Start Programme, the Social Entrepreneurship Programme and the Short Term Employment Scheme.

The new Business Start Programme (BSP) will commence in October 2011 and replace the current Go for It Programme. Go For It has played an important role in reaching many who have been impacted by job-loss and in supporting them to develop the skills / capacity to start a business. The Programme will also aim to help address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland by ensuring a balanced sub-regional growth, thus resulting in positive benefits to the West Belfast constituency.

Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) focuses on supporting new social economy businesses with the potential to grow, helping them to build the skills and capabilities to make an impact on the local economy. Invest NI will continue to work with social enterprises in West Belfast through the SEP to support local economic development and provide new job opportunities in the area. This support has resulted in the following number of new starts in the Constituency, over the last two financial years.

NEW STARTS IN WEST BELFAST PCA

Financial Year	Total
2009-2010	105
2010-2011	131
Total	236

The majority of Invest NI's property offering in the West Belfast constituency is already occupied by qualifying businesses, however, 32 acres of land and 12,800 square feet of workspace remain available and continues to be actively marketed to both existing and potential clients by Invest NI.

Given the current state of the local labour market, there is clearly an identified need for a temporary focus on job creation and, in order to address this, Invest NI will deliver a set of proposed measures, collectively known as the Short Term Employment Scheme (STES) which consists of a package of temporary measures specifically designed to boost employment by aiming to promote 5,000 new jobs over the next four years (2011 to 2015). Invest NI is already actively engaging with key stakeholders across industry, including those in West Belfast, and in other government departments to promote STES and to ensure that the measures we have developed will benefit and have a positive impact on both people living or businesses operating in West Belfast.

Investment in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the meetings her Department has held with investors in the last 12 months in relation to investing in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1142/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the past year, June 2010 to June 2011, Invest NI has held a number of meetings with existing and potential investors, both local and international, in relation to investing in West Belfast. These meetings are detailed as follows:

- 8 visits by prospective inward investors;
- 12 Property Services Unit meetings with existing and potential investors;
- 17 meetings with companies regarding ongoing R&D investment projects;
- 27 meetings with companies who are considering new R&D investment projects; and
- 37 meetings between the Invest NI Regional Belfast Team and existing or potential client companies in West Belfast.

In addition to the above meetings, Invest NI has held 18 meetings with stakeholder groups, including West Belfast Partnership Board, Greater Shankill Partnership Board, West Belfast and Greater Shankill (WBGs) Enterprise Council and WBGs Stakeholder Workshop Group. Invest NI is also discussing various projects from groups in the area. An example is a project regarding a National Centre for Irish Language and an Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hub.

There are also currently two recorded interests in respect to developing four acres of land in the Forth River Business Park.

Investment in Belfast, particularly inward investment, tends to be concentrated within a three mile radius of the city centre, and in all the Belfast constituencies the majority of people actually work outside the area where they live. It is appropriate, therefore, to state that investment in the greater Belfast area will benefit all of the Belfast constituencies, including West Belfast.

Solar Energy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available for domestic users who wish to install solar energy panels.

(AQW 1215/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NIE Energy, with support from the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme, provides up to £5000 assistance towards the installation of photovoltaic panels for the generation of electricity or £600 assistance for the installation of solar thermal panels for the generation of hot water.

Solar photovoltaic panels are also incentivised through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream for the electricity generated.

Further to this, my Department intends, over the summer, to consult on the development of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Northern Ireland. Consideration has been given to supporting a range of renewable heating technologies under this scheme, including solar thermal. Details of how the RHI will be administered and which technologies will be eligible will be made clear in the consultation.

Firmus Energy

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether Firmus Energy raised its natural gas tariffs for small industrial and commercial customers in the Greater Belfast area during 2011; (ii) on what date the tariff increase came into effect; (iii) for her assessment of the impact of any such increase; and (iv) the number of customers affected by the increase.

(AQW 1262/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Firmus energy offers their 1,500 small industrial and commercial gas customers in Greater Belfast a product which "tracks" the prices charged by the incumbent Phoenix Supply. Phoenix raised its retail gas tariffs by 39.1% from 1 May 2011, and firmus energy prices for small industrial and commercial customers have increased accordingly from that date.

Firmus advise that they still maintain a first year discount of 7.5% and second year discount of 5% against Phoenix gas prices, and that if Phoenix Supply prices fall, then they are committed to reducing their prices for small industrial and commercial customers.

Natural gas costs have been increasing in wholesale energy markets, however, even with increased retail prices in Greater Belfast, natural gas remains a cheaper option for consumers than oil.

Firmus Energy

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consultation her Department or its agencies had with Firmus Energy prior to any tariff increase being applied; and whether her Department has given its approval to an increase.

(AQW 1263/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Firmus energy has not increased gas prices in its gas licensed area covering 10 urban areas outside Greater Belfast. Neither has the company increased gas prices for domestic customers in Greater Belfast, where it is a competitor to the incumbent Phoenix Supply.

However, firmus energy offers their 1,500 small industrial and commercial gas customers in Greater Belfast a product which "tracks" the prices charged by the incumbent Phoenix Supply. Phoenix raised its retail gas tariffs by 39.1% from 1 May 2011, and firmus energy prices for small industrial and commercial customers have increased accordingly from that date.

As a competitor to Phoenix Supply within the natural gas licensed area of Greater Belfast, firmus energy is not required to submit tariff proposals to either the Department or the Utility Regulator for approval.

Energy and Fuel Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to alleviate the impact of rising energy and fuel costs.

(AQW 1311/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While my Department has no direct role in the setting of electricity and natural gas tariffs, my officials work closely with the Utility Regulator and the energy industry to establish, where possible, measures to put downward pressure on prices.

Among the tangible steps taken has been the opening to competition of the gas supply market in Greater Belfast and the electricity supply market across Northern Ireland. The creation of the Single Electricity Market since November 2007 has provided greater transparency, and an increased number of electricity suppliers in the retail market, thus acting to put downward pressure on retail electricity tariffs.

The ending of the legacy generation contract, and completion of payment of flue gas desulphurisation equipment at the AES Kilroot plant has acted to reduce the Public Service Obligation element of electricity bills.

Mutualisation of energy assets such as the Scotland to Northern Ireland gas pipeline, the Moyle electricity interconnector, and the Belfast gas transmission pipeline has also helped to reduce costs to gas and electricity consumers, through the use of profits and reserves to help off-set energy costs.

Retail prices for refined fuels in Northern Ireland respond to fluctuating wholesale prices and are set internationally. These and the tax levied on road fuels are outside the control of my Department.

Anaerobic Digestion Plants

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken in the last 12 months to encourage and assist farmers and businesses to install anaerobic digestion

plants; and (ii) for her assessment of the 'green investment bank' and how this could help businesses, in particular farmers who are considering whether to construct anaerobic digestion plants.

(AQW 1328/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- i. Since 1 April 2011 my Department has increased the level of support under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation for electricity generated through anaerobic digestion. Previously, this technology received 2 Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) per megawatt hour of electricity generated. The new levels are now 4 ROCs per megawatt hour for installed capacity up to 500 kilowatts and 3 ROCs per megawatt hour above 500 kilowatts up to 5 megawatts. These new levels are intended to encourage investment in anaerobic digestion and have been well received within the renewables and farming communities.
- ii. The Green Investment Bank (GIB) is a UK-wide initiative and will be open to Northern Ireland applicants once it is established. Establishment of the GIB is subject to state aid approval which is likely to be achieved by April 2012. The GIB will provide up to £3 billion over the period to 2015, however no decisions have yet been made definitively as to what particular sectors might be eligible for investment.

Investigation into the NI Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the costs incurred to date in relation to the Company Inspector's investigation into the NI Events Company.

(AQW 1348/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The cost incurred to date by DETI on the ongoing inspection is £474,000.

Carbon Price Support

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions have taken place with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change regarding the need for Northern Ireland to have a derogation or exemption from the carbon price support.

(AQW 1360/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Discussions with the Department of Energy and Climate Change and with HM Treasury on the carbon price floor measure at official level are ongoing, in the context of the Coalition Government's UK-wide Energy Market Reform (EMR) programme.

I have written to Chris Huhne MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in relation to EMR. I have also written specifically on the carbon price floor to both Charles Hendry MP, Minister of State, DECC, with responsibility for the EMR and Justine Greening MP, Economic Secretary, HM Treasury. I have also discussed the issue with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

NI Electricity

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the installation of a wind turbine, how NI Electricity determines a connection charge and how these charges are independently regulated.

(AQW 1396/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NIE are required to provide a connection offer to all generation connecting to the distribution system in line with their connection charging statement.

It should be noted that costs given within the statement are indicative only. The costs will vary from site to site due to the network topography in the area, the size of the turbine and other factors such as ground conditions and road crossings. NIE has 3 months from the day on which all of the relevant information is received to make a connection offer.

The Utility Regulator reviews the unit costs used in the connection charging statement and may consult upon any changes to the policies underpinning the charging statement. Any changes to the connection

charging statement must be approved by the Utility Regulator. The Utility Regulator is responsible for determining any disputes relating to connection costs.

NI Electricity

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what specific action NI Electricity has taken, or intends to take, in relation to the development of wind energy.

(AQW 1397/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In response to increasing demand for the connection of renewable generation, NIE has submitted proposals to the Utility Regulator for the capital investment required to the electricity network infrastructure in the fifth regulatory period (2012 – 2017). This proposal is currently subject to consultation (closing 18 July 2011). All of the work proposed by NIE is subject to the specific approval of the Utility Regulator, including the level of investment and timescale for implementation.

The infrastructure investment proposal reflects NIE's Renewable Integration Development Plan (RIDP) which looks, in the main, at connecting the on shore wind capacity in the West and North West of Ireland. NIE is also developing a wider plan for network infrastructure development, Network 25, for Northern Ireland following the publication of the Strategic Energy Framework.

DETI continues to work closely with NIE on the development of an Onshore Renewable Electricity Action Plan and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment, which examines the role of all onshore renewable electricity technologies, including onshore wind, in meeting the 40% renewable electricity target by 2020.

Investigation into the NI Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the extent of the PSNI involvement in the Company Inspector's investigation into the NI Events Company.

(AQW 1408/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not the Department's policy to make any comments on investigations which are currently underway.

Broadband Services in the South Armagh Area

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the broadband services in the South Armagh area and what action is being taken to improve the service.

(AQW 1482/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Due to an investment made by my Department in March 2004, broadband services with download speeds of 512kilobits per second (Kbps) or more have been available across the whole of Northern Ireland from December 2005. These services are delivered by a range of local, national and international suppliers using a number of technologies.

In December 2009, DETI embarked on the Next Generation Broadband Project which, through the deployment of fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) technology, will bring higher speed broadband services to at least 85% of businesses across Northern Ireland. This Programme for Government project has a business focus. However wholesale arrangements set down under the contract mean that other service providers can use the BT infrastructure to deliver their own products, which may also include services aimed at residential consumers. Cabinet upgrades have been completed across some 36 areas in the Newry and Armagh Constituency making available broadband services with potential download speeds of up to 40 megabits (Mbps) per second. Details of where these upgrades are located can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com or www.nibroadaband.com.

Due to distance from a cabinet or an exchange, not all premises will benefit from the technology deployed under the Next Generation Broadband Project. For that reason, DETI also has a contract in place with Avanti Communications to ensure that broadband services of between 512Kbps and 3

Mbps and using satellite technology are available to all premises in NI where it is not technically or economically possible to deliver fixed-line services.

Furthermore, the NI Broadband Fund, launched in August 2008, has provided support for businesses and organisations wishing to promote solutions for delivery of commercial, high speed broadband services in rural locations. One of the supported projects is deploying FTTC technology at an additional three locations across County Armagh i.e. in the Forkhill, Newtownhamilton and Crossmaglen exchange areas. A sixth call for project applications was issued on 4 July with a closing date of 12 August. As well as advertising in the press, Departmental officials have alerted the Chief Executives and Economic Development Officers in all District Councils providing them with an opportunity to work with local service providers to develop applications seeking support for localised broadband solutions.

Department of the Environment

Illegal Dumping at Ballyhornan Road, Downpatrick

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment at what stage is the investigation into illegal dumping at Ballyhornan Road, Downpatrick,

(AQW 718/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Northern Ireland Environment Agency staff have completed their investigation into this incident. Their case file was passed to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for consideration and the PPS has directed a prosecution.

Photographic Archives

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record and the Built Heritage Directorate's photographic archives will continue to be updated from 1 June 2011, given that the staff responsible for this task have been made redundant; and (ii) for his assessment of whether the loss of this function would impact upon the decision making process within the Planning Service.

(AQW 739/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There have been no redundancies among staff involved in the updating of the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) and the photographic archive in the Built Heritage Directorate of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). However, work to support the updating of these records, which are housed within the NIEA Monuments and Buildings Record, was largely delivered through contract support, and the most recent contract for this work came to an end on 31 May 2011. Work on the systematic updating of both the NISMR and the photographic archive is currently suspended.

Staff in the Built Heritage Directorate of NIEA are actively working on the development of new service-based contracts that will include these work activities. It is intended that these contracts should be operational by the end of this calendar year at the latest.

We are seeking to put in place other, interim, contract arrangements, and to have staff to address any immediate priorities.

There should be no major immediate direct impact upon the decision-making process within Planning NI.

Gorse Fires in the Mourne Mountains

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will co-ordinate a cross-departmental response to the future management of gorse, following the recent fires in the Mourne Mountains.

(AQW 744/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Water owns the majority of the lands in the Mourne where the recent wildfires have had the most impact. The remaining burned land is mostly farmed land over which DARD administers Common Land Trusts and monitors compliance with the Single Farm Payment in relation to Good Farming and Environmental Condition regulations.

My officials in NIEA have much expertise in habitat survey and monitoring, the management of ecosystems in the Eastern Mourne Special Area of Conservation, and with issues related to access to the countryside. For this reason NIEA has supported the Safer Mourne Partnership, an initiative led by the Mourne Heritage Trust.

I would be very supportive of a co-ordinated approach to the issue of wildfires across Northern Ireland and offer the services of my Departmental experts to help progress initiatives that will minimise the impacts of future fires and will support efforts to restore natural ecosystems and the services they provide in the affected areas. My officials have made contact with the Fire and Rescue Service to this effect.

However it may be useful to identify what further measures may be of use. I have written to the DARD, DRD and DHSSPS Ministers requesting a four-departmental meeting with DARD and DRD in the lead, to identify and exhaust all reasonable responses.

External Consultants and Media Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how much each local council spent on (i) external consultants; and (ii) external media services, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 828/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This information is not held centrally by my Department. However, I have written to all district councils seeking the information, and I would expect to be in a position to provide a substantive reply to you by 15 July 2011.

In doing so, I have authorised the breach of the £700 limit on responding to AQ's, as I believe it is in the needs of public interest and democratic accountability.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department intends to take to deliver local government reform under the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 867/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I continue to consider issues around Local Government reform, hope to create certainty sooner rather than later, identify potential savings through the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme (ICE) and shall keep members advised of progress.

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) all the North-South Ministerial Council meetings that he, or his predecessor, have attended since May 2007; (ii) the Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who attended each meeting; (iii) the issues that were discussed at each meeting; and (iv) the outcomes and achievements that resulted from each meeting.

(AQW 903/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since May 2007, the Minister of the Environment has attended 25 NSMC meetings on the following dates:

Environment	Minister of the Environment	Accompanying Minister	Irish Government
26/10/2007	Arlene Foster MLA	Margaret Ritchie MLA	John Gormley TD
20/03/2009	Sammy Wilson MP MLA	Margaret Ritchie MLA	John Gormley TD
30/10/2009	Edwin Poots MLA	Margaret Ritchie MLA	John Gormley TD
05/03/2010	Edwin Poots MLA	Margaret Ritchie MLA	John Gormley TD
20/10/2010	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	John Gormley TD

Transport	Minister of the Environment	Minister for Regional Development	Irish Government
14/09/2007	Arlene Foster MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
12/12/2007	Arlene Foster MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
21/05/2008	Arlene Foster MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
03/04/2009	Sammy Wilson MP MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
04/11/2009	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
03/03/2010	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
20/10/2010	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Noel Dempsey TD
09/02/2011	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Murphy MP MLA	Pat Carey TD

Agriculture	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Accompanying Minister	Irish Government
09/11/2007	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Arlene Foster MLA MLA	Mary Coughlan TD Éamon Ó Cuív TD
30/04/2008	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Arlene Foster MLA	Mary Coughlan TD Éamon Ó Cuív TD
20/03/2009	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Sammy Wilson MP MLA	Brendan Smith TD
21/07/2009	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Edwin Poots MLA	Brendan Smith TD Éamon Ó Cuív TD
31/03/2010	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Edwin Poots MLA	Brendan Smith TD
13/10/2010	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Edwin Poots MLA	Brendan Smith TD Pat Carey TD

Aquaculture & Marine	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Accompanying Minister	Irish Government
31/03/2010	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA	Edwin Poots MLA	Conor Lenihan TD

PLENARY 17 JULY 2007

Northern Ireland Executive	Irish Government
Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA (First Minister)	Bertie Ahern TD (Taoiseach)
Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)	Brian Cowen TD (Tánaiste and Minister for Finance)
Peter Robinson MP MLA (Minister of Finance and Personnel)	Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport and Marine)
Arlene Foster MLA (Minister of the Environment)	Dermot Ahern TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)
Edwin Poots MLA (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)	Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment)
Nigel Dodds MP MLA (Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment)	Seamus Brennan TD (Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism)
Conor Murphy MP MLA (Minister for Regional Development)	Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)
Michelle Gildernew MP MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)	Mary Coughlan TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)
Caitriona Ruane MLA (Minister of Education)	Mary Hanafin TD (Minister for Education and Science)
Sir Reg Empey MLA (Minister for Employment and Learning)	John Gormley TD (Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government)
Ian Paisley Jnr MLA (Junior Minister)	
Gerry Kelly MLA (Junior Minister)	

PLENARY 7 FEBRUARY 2008

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Bertie Ahern TD (Taoiseach)	Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA (First Minister)
Brian Cowen TD (Tánaiste and Minister for Finance)	Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)
Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport and Marine)	Peter Robinson MP MLA (Minister of Finance and Personnel)
Dermot Ahern TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)	Arlene Foster MLA (Minister of the Environment)
Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment)	Edwin Poots MLA (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)
Seamus Brennan TD (Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism)	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)
Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)	Caitriona Ruane MLA (Minister of Education)
Mary Coughlan TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)	Michael McGimpsey MLA (Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)
Mary Hanafin TD (Minister for Education and Science)	Michael McGimpsey MLA (Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Eamon Ryan TD (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources)	Margaret Ritchie MLA (Minister of Social Development)
Brendan Smith TD (Minister for Children)	Ian Paisley Jnr MLA (Junior Minister)
	Gerry Kelly MLA (Junior Minister)

PLENARY 23 JANUARY 2009

Northern Ireland Executive	Irish Government
The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP MLA (First Minister)	Brian Cowen TD (Taoiseach)
Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)	Mary Coughlan TD (Tánaiste and Minister for Finance)
Michelle Gildernew MP MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)	Brian Lenihan TD (Minister for Finance)
Gregory Campbell MP MLA (Minister of Culture, Arts & Leisure)	Mary Harney TD (Minister for Health and Children)
Caitriona Ruane MLA (Minister of Education)	Mary Harney TD (Minister for Health and Children)
Arlene Foster MLA (Minister of the Environment)	Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport)
Conor Murphy MP MLA (Minister for Regional Development)	Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)
Margaret Ritchie MLA (Minister for Social Development)	Martin Cullen TD (Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism)
Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA (Junior Minister)	Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)
Gerry Kelly MLA (Junior Minister)	Mary Hanafin TD (Minister for Social and Family Affairs)
	Eamon Ryan TD (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources)
	Brendan Smith TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)
	Batt O'Keefe TD (Minister for Education and Science)

PLENARY 5 JULY 2010

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Brian Cowen TD (Taoiseach)	The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA (First Minister)
Brian Lenihan TD (Minister for Finance)	Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)
Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Transport)	Sammy Wilson MP MLA (Minister for Finance and Personnel)

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)	Michelle Gildernew MP MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)
Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Social Protection)	Nelson McCausland MLA (Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure)
Mary Hanafin TD (Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport)	Caitríona Ruane MLA (Minister for Education)
John Gormley TD (Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government)	Sir Reg Empey MLA (Minister for Employment and Learning)
Eamon Ryan TD (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources)	Arlene Foster MLA (Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment)
Brendan Smith TD (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)	Edwin Poots MLA (Minister of the Environment)
Batt O'Keeffe TD (Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation)	Conor Murphy MP MLA (Minister for Regional Development)
Dermot Ahern TD (Minister for Justice and Law Reform)	Alex Attwood MLA (Minister for Social Development)
Pat Carey TD (Minister for Community Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs)	Robin Newton MLA (OFMdfM Junior Minister)
Barry Andrews TD (Minister of State Department of Health and Children)	

PLENARY 10 JUNE 2011

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Enda Kenny TD (Taoiseach)	The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA (First Minister)
Michael Noonan TD (Minister for Finance)	Martin McGuinness MP MLA (deputy First Minister)
Ruairí Quinn TD (Minister for Education and Skills)	Alex Attwood MLA (Minister of the Environment)
Brendan Howlin TD (Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform)	Stephen Farry MLA (Minister for Employment and Learning)
Richard Bruton TD (Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation)	Danny Kennedy MLA (Minister for Regional Development)
Joan Burton TD (Minister for Social Protection)	Nelson McCausland MLA (Minister for Social Development)
Jimmy Deenihan TD (Minister for Arts Heritage and Gaeltacht)	Carál Ní Chuilín MLA (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)
Pat Rabbitte TD (Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources)	John O'Dowd MLA (Minister for Education)
Phil Hogan TD (Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government)	Michelle O'Neill MLA (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Irish Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Simon Coveney TD (Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food)	Sammy Wilson MP MLA (Minister for Finance and Personnel)
Frances Fitzgerald TD (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs)	Martina Anderson MLA (Junior Minister OFMdfM)
James Reilly TD (Minister for Health)	Jonathan Bell MLA (Junior Minister OFMdfM)
Leo Varadkar (Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport)	

- iii) Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each NSMC meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these Statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

I, as a firm believer in the North/South arrangements, consider that the Department of the Environment lends itself to a strong North/South agenda. I met with Minister Hogan, my Dublin counterpart on 1 July 2011 and we outlined at that time and in other conversations our particular and our common ambitions going forward.

Planning Applications for Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Plants

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the increase in the number of planning applications for anaerobic digestion (AD) plants; and to detail the location of each application for AD plants received in the last twelve months.

(AQW 912/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has received 43 planning applications for anaerobic digestion plants in the last twelve months. I welcome the increase in planning applications for renewable energy development, including anaerobic digestion plants. It is the understanding of planning officials that the increase in the number of applications is explained in part by the increased availability of funding from DARD and other sources for such proposals, and also in part by the increase in ROCS (Renewable Obligation Certificates) levels for electricity generated from these facilities.

Anaerobic digestion plants are considered to be renewable energy developments, and such proposals will be permitted, provided the proposal and any associated buildings and infrastructure will not result in unacceptable adverse impacts on residential and environmental amenity.

The location of each application for AD plants received in the last twelve months is detailed in the table below.

Planning Reference	Date Application Received	Location
A/2011/0247/F	08/04/2011	Lands 150 metres south of Willsborough House Willsborough Estate Donnybrewer Road Campsie Londonderry
A/2011/0368/F	09/06/2011	160m South East of 334 Longland Road Claudy Co Londonderry BT47 4AJ

Planning Reference	Date Application Received	Location
B/2010/0445/F	15/12/2010	237 Metres West Of 206 Drumrane Road Templemoyle BT49 9LJ
B/2011/0026/F	15/12/2010	Lands 100m west of 68 Gortnacross Road Drumsum
C/2011/0131/F	23/03/2011	60m South of 75 Creamery Road Cloyfin Coleraine BT52 2NE
D/2010/0297/F	01/10/2010	43 Doneyshiel Road, Rasharkin
D/2011/0058/F	28/02/2011	Lands 40m west of no. 21 Drumlee Road, Finvoy, Ballymoney, Co Antrim BT53 7LE
D/2011/0095/F	08/04/2011	180m South of 100 Knockahollet Road Dunloy Ballymena
G/2011/0075/F	16/02/2011	Lands 100m west of no.11 Drumramer Road Ahoghill Ballymena Co Antrim BT42 2RD
H/2011/0265/F	03/05/2011	Lands circa 20 metres west of 61 Creagh Road Creagh BT41
I/2011/0232/F	13/05/2011	185 metres east of no. 5 Ardagh Road Coagh Co. Tyrone BT80 OAU
I/2011/0258/F	31/05/2011	130m north east of 72 Kilmascally Road Dungannon Co Tyrone BT71 5BL
J/2010/0475/F	03/12/2010	150m north west of 99 Peacock Road Sion Mills Strabane BT82 9NF
J/2010/0485/F	26/11/2010	120m South West of 29 Erganagh Road Castlederg Co. Tyrone.
J/2010/0488/F	28/11/2010	100m South East of 125 Strabane Road Castlederg Co Tyrone.
J/2011/0013/F	05/01/2011	42 Deerpark Road Newtownstewart Co Tyrone
J/2011/0051/F	08/02/2011	120m north west of 22 Spout Road Strabane Co Tyrone BT82 8NA

Planning Reference	Date Application Received	Location
J/2011/0081/F	24/02/2011	70m North of 4 Towncastle Road Strabane Co Tyrone BT82 0AH
J/2011/0118/F	23/03/2011	100m north-west of 26 Deerpark Road Newtownstewart BT78 4LA
J/2011/0146/F	06/04/2011	Lands 40m north of no. 33 Tievenny Road Fyfin Strabane Co Tyrone BT82 9LW
J/2011/0194/F	15/04/2011	160m south of 38 Baronscourt Road Largah Newtownstewart Omagh Co Tyrone BT78 4EY
J/2011/0195/F	20/04/2011	50m NE of 19 Strahans Road Strabane
J/2011/0216/F	09/05/2011	100m South West of 99 Dunnalong Road Bready Strabane BT82 ODP
K/2011/0216/F	01/04/2011	160m south west of 180 Cloughfin Road Sixmilecross BT79 9EQ
L/2010/0914/F	21/12/2010	80 metres north of 71 Creevehill Road Fivemiletown BT75 OSX
L/2011/0413/F	13/05/2011	60m east of 54 Keady Road Lisnaskea BT92 ODF
M/2011/0383/F	06/06/2011	100m south of 92 Old Eglish Road Killyquin Dungannon BT71 7PG
M/2011/0395/F	10/06/2011	110m east of 174 Aghafad Road Clogher Co Tyrone.
N/2011/0132/F	29/03/2011	60m east of 21 Aughalee Road Craigavon BT67 OAS
P/2011/0246/F	08/03/2011	Approximately 815 metres east of no. 60 Tandragee Road Newry
P/2011/0488/F	17/05/2011	22 Moneygore Road Rathfriland Co Down BT34 5PN

Planning Reference	Date Application Received	Location
P/2011/0587/F	16/06/2011	lands 500m east of Narrow Water Castle Newry Road Warrenpoint County Down BT34 3LE
Q/2010/0585/F	25/11/2010	40m west of No.31 Reservoir Road Banbridge BT32 4LD
Q/2011/0028/F	24/01/2011	100m north west of 156 Ballygowan Road Banbridge
R/2010/0987/F	09/12/2010	21 Knocksiticken Road Clough BT30 8RE
R/2011/0181/F	01/03/2011	60m north of 40 Drumanaghan Road Clough Downpatrick BT30 8SD
R/2011/0281/F	31/03/2011	80m South East of 64 Killough Road Ballymote Middle Downpatrick BT30 8BL
S/2010/1020/F	09/12/2010	100m south of 10 Lough Road Upper Ballinderry
S/2011/0257/F	23/03/2011	100m east of 27 Nut Hill Road Moira BT67 0PH
T/2010/0491/F	21/10/2010	lands 130m north of no. 22 Gobrana Road Glenavy Co Antrim BT29 4LQ
T/2011/0092/F	09/03/2011	70m south east of 45 Loughview Road Crumlin BT29 4RF
T/2011/0226/F	06/06/2011	100m south of 104 Moira Road Crumlin Co Antrim BT29 4HG
X/2010/0893/F	09/12/2010	100 meters west of 189 Moss Road Millisle BT22 2DX

Planning Applications for Wind Turbines

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the recent BBC reports on the rejection of Planning Applications for wind turbines, whether he will undertake a review of the PPS18 guidelines to ensure that applications are given extra consideration by Planning Service staff in relation to renewable energy resources, particularly in rural areas.

(AQW 979/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will undertake to look at how PPS 18 is being implemented to make sure that the wider economic and social benefits are taken into consideration as well as the environmental issue in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy. Indeed, I will look closely to identify where applications are being declined and assess what is the best way to proceed.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 1051/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below details my Department's expenditure on its Minister's Special Advisers:

Total Salaries Paid	£207,283.66
Salary Band	Since 2007, the Ministers' Special Advisers have been on pay Band B which was £57,300 - £79,740, increasing from 1 April 2011, to £57,300 - £82,531.
Employer's Pension Contributions	£26,585.04 Pension contributions are based on the age and salary of the individual and determined by the particular scheme/arrangement to which the Special Adviser belongs.
Nat. Ins. Contributions	£21,855.91
Expenses	£1,500.29
Office Costs	There were no incremental office costs as Special Advisers utilise existing NICS DFP provided accommodation and equipment.
Other Costs	None.

Legislation to Ban the Use of Election Posters in Public Places

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to commence a consultation process on legislation to ban the use of election posters in public places, except in restricted areas within close proximity to polling stations on the day preceding and the day of the election.

(AQW 1069/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware of the recent interest in a proposal to ban election posters. I intend to write to all registered NI political parties to establish their views and I will arrange for a short scoping exercise to determine practices in other jurisdictions.

Fixed Penalty Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment under what circumstances are penalty points not applied when a Fixed Penalty Notice is issued for a motoring offence.

(AQW 1089/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The legislation governing the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices and penalty points is The Road Traffic Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Under this legislation, there are a number of circumstances where penalty points are not applied following the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice, as set out below:

- 1 A Fixed Penalty Notice may be issued for an endorsable or non-endorsable motoring offence. A non-endorsable offence does not attract penalty points and the person normally only receives a £30 fine in these circumstances.
- 2 When a Fixed Penalty Notice is issued the person has 21 days to either pay the penalty or request a Court hearing. If a person requests a hearing no penalty points will be endorsed on the licence following the issue of the Fixed Penalty Notice but may be following the outcome of the Court hearing.
- 3 A Fixed Penalty Notice should only be issued where the proposed penalty points will not bring the total points to 12 or more as disqualification from driving is likely to arise. Where a notice is mistakenly issued in these circumstances the fixed penalty clerk must not endorse the points on the licence but send it to the Chief Constable to consider Court proceedings.
- 4 If the recipient of the Fixed Penalty Notice was not the owner of the vehicle at the time of the offence and makes a statutory statement of ownership to that effect he will not be liable for the offence. Also, if he was not the driver at the time he would not be liable.

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will enact the provisions in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 through subordinate legislation to increase the fines for dog fouling.

(AQW 1113/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A comprehensive subordinate legislation and guidance programme is required to underpin the wide ranging provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and to ensure it is implemented effectively. As part of this programme, my Department is running consultation exercises on subordinate legislation that will allow for increases to the fines for dog fouling. I have asked officials to work to as early a date to have the provision in place and no later than April 2012.

Motorbikes and Quad Bikes on Public Beaches

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what by-laws exist to stop motorbikes and quad bikes from being driven on public beaches.

(AQW 1181/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are currently no bye-laws to stop motorbikes and quad bikes from being driven on public beaches.

The Department of the Environment does not have any power to make bye-laws on its own behalf regarding vehicles on public beaches. The Department is, however, the confirming authority for bye-laws made by district councils regarding the seashore, under provision of section 82 of the Public Health Acts (Amendment) Act 1907. Bye-laws made under this power may make provision to regulate vehicles on beaches.

In January 2011, the Department made four Orders (on application by the respective councils) to extend sections 82 and 83 of the 1907 Act to the districts of Carrickfergus Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council, Down District Council and North Down Borough Council. There is no record of any other such Orders being made since 1971, prior to the establishment of the current 26 councils.

The four Councils named above are currently preparing draft bye-laws to address their particular needs. The Department will submit the proposed bye-laws to the Departmental Solicitor's Office to ensure that they have been drafted correctly, and that they are within the powers of the relevant council to make. When draft bye-laws are approved by the Departmental Solicitor's Office, a district council has a statutory obligation, under section 91 of the 1972 Act, to advertise the bye-laws and make them available for inspection for at least one month before applying to the Department for confirmation.

As the foreshore is a reserved matter, under section 4 of and Schedule 3 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, additional consent from the Department for Transport is required for bye-laws made under section 82 of the 1907 Act.

If any member has a concern about this issue, the Department requests the information and would then consider contacting the relevant council.

To avail of this enabling power, a district council must first have applied to the Department for an Order to extend section 82 of the Public Health Acts (Amendment) Act 1907 to its district.

In January of this year, the Department made four such Orders, on application by the respective councils, which will enable Carrickfergus Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council, Down District Council and North Down Borough Council to make bye-laws for the seashore.

The drafting and content of the bye-laws are now matters for the individual councils concerned. Provision to regulate the use of motorbikes and quad bikes will therefore be at the discretion of each council.

Local Government: Waste Management

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to incentivise local councils to meet their waste management targets.

(AQW 1269/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department's Rethink Waste Programme incentivises councils to meet their waste management targets. The Rethink Waste (Capital) Fund incentivises local councils by providing funding directly to cover the capital costs of improving or extending their existing waste collection, re-use and recycling infrastructure.

In 2010-11, £4.2m of capital grants was awarded to councils to help achieve their targets and also reduce the burden on the ratepayer, diverting 27,000 tonnes of waste from landfill. I have recently launched a further £1.5M of capital funding for councils in 2011-12.

Councils can also apply for funding under the Rethink Waste (Revenue) Fund. I recently launched £400,000 of funding for 2011-12 to cover revenue costs for initiatives which will improve resource efficiency and boost prevention, recycling and re-use activity.

In addition to this financial funding, the Department also supports councils in meeting their targets by providing technical advice to improve the quality and efficiency of collection and recycling services offered to households and businesses, resulting in increases in the collection of quality materials for reuse and recycling and by funding Love Food Hate Waste and composting demonstration packages to encourage waste prevention and reuse.

European Landscape Convention

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment which division within his Department or its arm's-length bodies leads on the European Landscape Convention which was signed by the UK Government in 2006.

(AQW 1271/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department's Environmental Policy Division is the main point of contact on matters relating to the European Landscape Convention, with support from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Republic of Ireland Trade Plates

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the legislation that allows cars with trade plates from the Republic of Ireland to be clamped by the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

(AQW 1279/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is administered by the Driver & Vehicle Agency in Northern Ireland under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport. It is currently an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport.

I am aware that an issue has arisen in relation to this legislation and that a view has been taken in Derry D.P.P. in relation to one case.

I have asked for information in relation to the case, the basis for Derry D.P.P. taking a view on the case, the position in law in relation to powers under the current legislation and other relevant information

Taxi Enforcement

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff were employed on taxi enforcement on (i) 2 March 2011; and (ii) 16 March 2011; and (iii) 23 June 2011.

(AQW 1284/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency employed the following numbers of staff on taxi enforcement on the dates shown:

Period	Officers Appointed	Staff In Post
2 March 2011	10	8
16 March 2011	10	10
23 June 2011	12	11

In addition to the number of staff outlined in the above table, a further five experienced enforcement officers from other areas of the enforcement directorate were utilised on taxi enforcement duties in this period.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Disciplinary Actions Against Civil Servants

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many disciplinary actions were taken against civil servants in each Department, in each of the last five years; (ii) at what rank were the civil servants against whom the action was taken; and (iii) how many of these actions resulted in the dismissal of the member of staff.

(AQW 854/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is provided in the tables attached.

i) Disciplinary actions taken against civil servants in each Department in each of last 5 years:

Department	Financial Year					Total
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010-11	
DARD	16	9	12	12	20	69
DE	2	1	7	2	5	17
DEL	10	7	11	8	11	47
DETI	7	4	4	3	2	20
DFP	3	1	6	8	5	23

Department	Financial Year					Total
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010-11	
DOE*	n/a	n/a	20	17	6	43
DRD	8	9	51	31	31	130
DSD*	n/a	n/a	144	110	84	338
NIO**	0	1	10	10	n/a	21
OFMDFM	0	0	0	0	0	0
DOJ**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	5
DHSSPS	7	4	0	5	4	20
DCAL*	n/a	n/a	1	3	1	5
PPS***	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2
Total	53	36	266	209	176	740

* These Departments do not hold the information requested for that period.

** DOJ came into existence in April 2010 following devolution of policing and justice.

*** Public Prosecution Service was a legal office of the NIO prior to the 12th April 2010.

(ii) Rank of civil servants against whom the action was taken from 1st April 2008 until 31 March 2011**.

Analogous grade*	Total
Administrative Assistant	122
Administrative Officer	266
Executive Officer 2	77
Executive Officer 1	33
Staff Officer	31
Deputy Principal	9
Grade 7	5
Industrial Staff	108
Total	651

* Analogous grades represent those who are in the general service grade and those analogous to them in other disciplines/ specialist areas.

** The data for 2006/07 and 2007/08 is not included as some Departments do not have records for that time.

(iii) Ninety six members of staff have been dismissed as a result of disciplinary action over the last five years.

BBC Spotlight Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether he, on his own behalf or on behalf of the First Minister or otherwise, sought legal advice through the Departmental Solicitor's Office from a QC in, or around, December 2009 in relation to the allegations made against the First Minister in a BBC Spotlight programme; (ii) whether the advice when received was seen by the Minister and to

who else it was circulated; (iii) whether he will waive the legal professional privilege and publish the advice, along with the instructions that were issued; and (iv) what expense was incurred in seeking and obtaining the advice and any resulting actions.

(AQW 983/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In relation to parts (i) and (iii) of the question, I refer to previous written answers on this matter namely AQW 4451/10, 4452/10, 4453/10, 4806/10 and AQO 847/10 and to oral answer AQO 945/10 – 16th March 2010.

In relation to parts (ii) and (iv) of the question, I have seen the advice but as to its further dissemination as this is confidential legal advice it is not a matter on which it would be appropriate to respond. The only expense incurred was counsel's fee of £4500 plus VAT.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 1003/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department has one Special Adviser in post at any given time and they were paid in the following pay bands in each of the financial years from 2007-08 to 2010-11:

2007-08	£56,100 - £78,540
2008-09	£56,100 - £78,540
2009-10	£57,300 - £82,531
2010-11	£57,300 - £82,531

Pension benefits are provided through the Northern Ireland Civil Service pension arrangements which are administered by Civil Service Pensions (CSP).

Employers' contributions for Premium/Nuvos members are currently payable at one of four rates in the range 18 to 25 per cent of pensionable pay, based on salary bands.

Salary Band	Annual Full Time Equivalent Pensionable Salary 2010/11	Employers' ASLC Charge
	£ pa	% of salary
1	up to 23,099	18
2	23,100 to 46,899	20
3	46,900 to 100,999	23.5
4	101,000 and over	25

For members of the Partnership Pension Account the employer makes a basic contribution of between 3% and 12.5% (depending on the age of the member) into a stakeholder pension product chosen by the employee. The employee does not have to contribute but where they do make contributions, the employer will match these up to a limit of 3% of pensionable salary (in addition to the employer's basic contribution). Employers also contribute a further 0.8% of pensionable salary to cover the cost of centrally-provided risk benefit cover (death in service and ill health retirement). The Partnership pension account booklet is on the CSP website: http://www.dfni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni/partnership_pension_account_____sep_2008_layout_1.pdf

Partnership rates (as in the booklet):

Age at last 6 April	% Rate contribution
Under 21	3
21 to 25	4.5
26 to 30	6.5
31 to 35	8
36 to 40	10
41 to 45	11.5
46 or over	12.5

To give further detailed information on pension contributions paid would risk a disclosure under the Data Protection Act as the scheme/arrangement the member is in is personal information.

The Department has paid expenses totalling £12,091.14 to Special Advisers from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

There were no incremental office costs as a result of Special Advisers using existing NICS DFP provided accommodation.

Incremental costs of IT and payroll services are estimated to be in the region of £1,500 per annum.

Communication costs are estimated to be in the region of £1,300 from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

Cost information is provided in financial years in accordance with departmental financial reporting.

Civil Law Reform Powers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects civil law reform powers to be transferred from his Department.

(AQW 1300/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department currently shares civil law reform responsibilities with the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice sponsors the Northern Ireland Law Commission which includes within its remit the reform of both the civil and criminal law. My Department also has a responsibility for civil law reform and policy on the regulation of the profession of solicitors. I have no immediate plans to propose a transfer of these functions.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the current position in relation to the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.

(AQW 1323/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current Small Business Rate Relief Scheme was introduced in April 2010 and benefits just under 16,000 business ratepayers who occupy lower value premises. Last year it cost around £6.5m in terms of revenue forgone.

At present 50% relief is awarded under the small business rate relief (SBRR) scheme where the NAV of the property is £2,000 or less. 25% relief is awarded where the NAV is between £2,001 and £5,000. While the scheme has a general application, certain property types are excluded. These are unoccupied or partially unoccupied properties, ATMs, property used for the display of advertisements, car parks, sewage works, telecommunications masts and properties occupied by public bodies.

The relief is awarded automatically, on eligible properties, by Land and Property Services. Small Post Offices get enhanced relief and this element of the scheme may require an application to be made in some cases.

I recently published a consultation paper containing proposals to extend the SBRR scheme, funded through a large retail levy. The aim would be to rebalance the business rates system so that during this continuing economic downturn, and through to recovery, additional smaller businesses get help while the very largest retailers pay more. All MLAs were notified of the consultation proposals, as well as my preferred approach, on 28 June 2011.

My preferred approach, in relation to the SBRR scheme, would be a general expansion of the scheme, with 20% relief provided to eligible businesses with an NAV of between £5,001 and £10,000. No additional relief would be provided to those currently receiving SBRR (NAV of £5,000 or below).

Review of Family Law

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the review of family law which started in 2002 has been halted; and how much the review has cost to date.

(AQW 1337/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has not undertaken a review of family law. I am, however, assuming that this is a reference to the preliminary research which my Department has undertaken with regard to the arrangements for contact with children.

The research commenced in 2005, but had to be set aside in light of other Departmental priorities. The research, which consisted of meetings with a number of stakeholders and the distribution and analysis of questionnaires, was undertaken by two members of DFP staff. A consultant, who was employed on a separate piece of work, assisted in the preparation of the first draft of the analysis of the responses to the questionnaires. Given the nature of this work, and the fact that no-one was tasked to complete it on a full-time basis, it would not be possible to provide a cost analysis.

Report on the Review of Family Law

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why newspaper clippings of Fathers for Justice were included in the report on the review of family law.

(AQW 1338/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has not undertaken a review of family law and there is, therefore, no report on that issue. I am, however, assuming that this is a reference to the preliminary research which my Department has undertaken with regard to the arrangements for contact with children.

As part of that preliminary work, questionnaires were issued and the responses to the questionnaires were analysed. In the Spring of 2010 the Department was asked to release papers relating to that particular strand of work and a range of papers from the relevant files were duly disclosed, including the draft analysis of responses, newspaper clippings, extracts from legal journals and studies which had been undertaken in England and Wales.

It is customary for information to be gathered from a range of sources and for that information to feed into the policy development process, with a view to ensuring that the full range of opinions, and all of the options, are duly considered.

Special EU Programmes Body Workforce

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a breakdown of the community background of staff employed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

(AQW 1355/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The community background of staff currently employed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is:

Protestant	14
Catholic	28
Non Determined	7

These figures apply only to staff employed in the SEUPB's Belfast and Omagh offices. The SEUPB is not legislatively required to monitor the community background of staff employed in its Monaghan office.

Policies: Pensioners

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all the policies that have been implemented by his Department since 2007 which specifically help pensioners.

(AQW 1361/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Since 2007 my Department has introduced an integrated package of measures focused on helping pensioners with their rates.

The lone pensioner allowance gives a 20% discount to pensioners aged 70 or over living alone. Since its introduction in 2008 the total amount of money awarded to ratepayers (at 29 May 2011) has been £15.3 million. Almost 30,000 have benefitted, with an average award of around £170 per year. Broad indications are that take up levels of lone pensioner allowance are approaching 80%.

A rate relief scheme was also introduced in 2007, providing additional help with rates (over and above that provided through the housing benefit system) to those on low incomes. This is unique to Northern Ireland. The savings limit for pensioners under the rate relief scheme increased from £16,000 to £50,000 in April 2008, meaning that they can hold more savings and still be entitled to relief. Aside from more being entitled to rate relief another change occurred in November 2009 when exempt capital (including savings) was increased from £6,000 to £10,000. This means that in calculating the amount of relief, the assessed return on capital and savings of up to £10,000 is ignored as income.

In April 2010 a rates deferment scheme was introduced, providing a further payment option for owner occupier pensioners. This allows eligible pensioners to defer the payment of rates until the sale of their property.

A range of decisions on the wider rating system have also benefitted pensioners. This included the regional rate freeze (in cash terms) over the last three years and the regional rate freeze in real terms that will apply through to the end of the current spending review period (31 March 2015). This means that bills are lower than they otherwise would have been.

Some pensioners may also be eligible for disabled person's allowance, which was modified in 2007 to provide a 25% reduction in rates payable where certain facilities are required to meet the needs of a person with a disability who lives there. This would be available to those of pension age.

New data sharing powers have also been introduced to increase the take up of rate reliefs, assisting all households including pensioners.

Domestic Rates Discounts for Serving Soldiers

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether domestic rates discounts are available for serving soldiers, who own property in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1401/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are no domestic rates discounts provided through the Northern Ireland rating system for serving soldiers who own property in Northern Ireland.

Serving soldiers, who are owner-occupiers, would be liable to pay full rates to Land and Property Services when posted abroad, and would be considered to be in rateable occupation where, for example, the property is furnished or there is an intention to return to the property.

The Ministry of Defence, however, introduced a Council Tax Relief Scheme in 2008, which partially reimburses soldiers on active service overseas for their Council Tax payments or contributions paid instead of council tax for service family accommodation. That relief was increased from 25% to 50% on the 1 July this year.

In answer to a recent Parliamentary Question, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever) confirmed that the Ministry of Defence-funded relief scheme applies to relevant personnel with property in Northern Ireland under the same terms as those in England, Scotland and Wales.

The recent increase is good news but this is not something my Department can take the credit for as the policy and administration of the scheme are matters for the Ministry of Defence.

Code of Practice for the Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether the Code of Practice for the Appointment of Special Advisers which was in force at the beginning of the 2007 Assembly mandate remains unchanged; (ii) when and why any changes were made; and (iii) to publish the Code of Practice which was in force when Special Advisers were appointed at the beginning of this Assembly mandate. **(AQW 1415/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: The Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers itself has not changed from that used from the 8 May 2007 although the Special Advisers' model contract appended to it has. These changes were made towards the end of the previous administration for use by the current administration when the opportunity was taken to clarify certain clauses in the contract.

I have arranged for a copy of the current Code of Practice to be placed in the Assembly library.

Civil Service Handbook

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Civil Service Handbook has been updated to take account of devolution. **(AQW 1433/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: The HR Handbook for the Northern Ireland Civil Service is kept up to date through amendments introduced to reflect changing legislative and employment law issues.

The Code of Ethics in the HR Handbook has been revised to reflect the accountability of Civil Servants in the devolved administration. Alongside that, the whistle blowing policy in the HR Handbook has been amended to include a nominated officer from the Department of Justice who would deal with any potential whistle blowing complaints or potential breaches of the Code of Ethics if raised within that Department in the first instance.

Forward Economic Development Plan

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Department formulates a forward economic development plan for the economy; and how economic modelling is processed. **(AQW 1439/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: As a member of the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy, I have been working with Executive colleagues to develop a new Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland.

This new Strategy will be based on a framework for economic growth – that was set out in an initial consultation document published in January 2011 – that incorporates our twin goals of rebalancing the economy towards higher value added private sector activity, and the need to undertake a more immediate rebuilding phase to address the impact of the global downturn.

The development of this framework was based on an analysis of Northern Ireland's economic performance and a consideration of economic forecasts and other research commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment which has lead policy responsibility in that regard.

Based on the results of this initial consultation, and input from all Executive Departments, a full draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy will be produced and subject to public consultation later this year.

2011 Census Forms

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many homes did not receive 2011 Census forms; and how many homes did not return 2011 Census forms.

(AQW 1470/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Census forms were issued to all domestic properties in the run up to Census Day, 27 March 2011. Around 6,000 households subsequently contacted Census Office and claimed not to have received a form. Census forms were sent to all such households.

The response rate in the 2001 Census was estimated to be 95%. Early indications are that the 2011 response rate will be broadly in line with that achieved in 2001.

Budgetary Processes

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what work is being undertaken by his Department to streamline the budgetary process; and what is the timescale for this work.

(AQW 1471/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Terms of Reference for a Review of the Financial Process in Northern Ireland, agreed by the previous Executive on 10 February 2011, incorporates examining the budgetary process with a view to streamlining it.

Officials have begun work to identify all misalignments between Budgets, Estimates and Accounts, to review the current publications and to consult with all key stakeholders such as departments, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and, in particular, the Assembly via the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The timescale for the Review, as set out in the Terms of Reference, is to report to the Executive by early 2012 and to the Assembly by 31 March 2012.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

3fivetwo Healthcare

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has paid to 3fivetwo Healthcare in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 1152/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): No expenditure has been incurred by my Department in relation to 3fivetwo Healthcare in the last three financial years.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is responsible for negotiating and managing contracts with the Independent Sector (IS) on behalf of Trusts.

The expenditure incurred by each Health and Social Care Trust for 3fivetwo Healthcare in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	£4,195,841	£7,006,702	£3,299,560
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	£1,261,534	£2,228,463	£545,202

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	£3,778,129	£8,703,889	£2,023,610
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	£3,564,477	£4,153,751	£626,055
Western Health & Social Care Trust	£1,467,705	£1,008,820	£568,389
Total	£14,267,686	£23,101,625	£7,062,816

Dentistry

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to identify the areas of regulation by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) that do not apply to dentistry; and when the RQIA will be able to provide the templates, to assist dentists with the regulatory system, that the Minister mentioned during Oral Questions on 20 June 2011.

(AQW 1203/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is for the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), as the independent regulator, to provide suitable guidance and assistance to the private dental sector in completing their applications for registration.

It is also the duty of RQIA to require all the information that is necessary under the law to enable it to complete registration and inspection processes, as indeed it is incumbent upon private dental practices to meet all relevant statutory requirements.

The Regulations have been developed to ensure primarily that all practices perform to a recognised standard of care and treatment. This is particularly important when considering applications from new dentists.

My Department has published Minimum Care Standards for Dental Care and Treatment and these have been distributed to all dentists. The standards largely encapsulate within 15 headings the majority of what is required of dentists within the legislation to deliver a quality service, including issues related to care and treatment, consent, radiological protection and health and safety issues, communication, confidentiality, service management, human resources, medical and other emergency arrangements, prevention and control of infection, the environment in which services are delivered and promoting and protecting the care of children and young people.

It is not therefore so much a question of introducing significant numbers of new requirements upon dental practices, as ensuring that the legislative requirements and good practice standards are being met in every respect.

I have asked, RQIA to engage closely with dentists and their representatives across Northern Ireland, in order to provide advice and guidance on the registration process

To date, the majority of practices have made applications for registration and a further ten have applied for exemption since they provide wholly NHS care. RQIA is currently pursuing applications from around 130 remaining practices.

RQIA staff are available to provide further help to dentists who have difficulty in completing the application process and extensive guidance is already available on the RQIA website. This will be added to with a further guidance template in the first week of July.

Food Safety Promotion Board Workforce

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the community background of staff employed by the Food Safety Promotion Board.

(AQW 1254/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Food Safety Promotion Board has historically not monitored the community background of staff as it does not employ any staff in Northern Ireland. I have asked that they now begin to monitor the community background of staff.

Accident and Emergency Services at the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish his strategy for Accident and Emergency Services at the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick.

(AQW 1326/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not made any decisions regarding the re-configuration of health and social care services including Accident and Emergency services at the Downe Hospital. I shall, however, be looking at issues which impact on the provision of treatment and care in the Trusts. I want to assure the public that the safety and quality of services will be my first concern. My focus will be on improvement in health outcomes for the population of Northern Ireland.

Accident and Emergency Waiting Times

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the average waiting time experienced by patients at the Accident and Emergency Units in (i) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; (ii) the Antrim Area Hospital; and (iii) Altnagelvin Hospital on (a) Friday 24 June 2011; and (b) Saturday 25 June 2011.

(AQW 1327/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on Emergency Care attendances and waiting times is collected and published quarterly and is available from: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/emergency_care-3.htm

Information on average emergency care waiting times is not readily available, as my Department does not routinely collect information on emergency care attendances at a patient level. However, information is available on the number of patients waiting less than 4 hours, from 4 to 12 hours, and over 12 hours in emergency care departments on Friday 24th June 2011 and Saturday 25th June 2011, and is detailed in the following tables:

EMERGENCY CARE WAITING TIME FROM ARRIVAL TO DEPARTURE ON FRIDAY 24TH JUNE 2011

Emergency Care Department	Within 4 hours	4 to 12 hours	Over 12 hours	Total New & Unplanned Review attendances
(i) Causeway	80	19	13	112
(ii) Antrim Area	124	53	19	196
(iii) Altnagelvin	127	25	0	152

Source: Northern HSC Trust & Western HSC Trust

EMERGENCY CARE WAITING TIME FROM ARRIVAL TO DEPARTURE ON SATURDAY 25TH JUNE 2011

Emergency Care Department	Within 4 hours	4 to 12 hours	Over 12 hours	Total New & Unplanned Review attendances
(i) Causeway	75	28	4	107
(ii) Antrim Area	115	31	22	168
(iii) Altnagelvin	103	44	1	148

Source: Northern HSC Trust & Western HSC Trust

Clinical Negligence Cases

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of clinical negligence cases lodged by patients in each of the last three years; (ii) the number of these cases which have been heard; (iii) the number of cases which have been settled in favour of the patient; and (iv) the total cost of solicitors and barristers engaged to work on these cases.

(AQW 1329/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department has recently developed a new data collection system for clinical/social care negligence cases. As such I do not have the information requested for the last three years. However, I do have the following information:

- i) Provisional data for 2009/10 would indicate that there were 1,423 clinical/social care negligence cases open which related to claims that had been lodged within the last three years.

Year of Claim	Number of Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases
2007/08	341
2008/09	543
2009/10	539
Total	1,423

- ii) The table below shows the outcome of these 1,423 clinical/social care negligence cases at 31st March 2010.

Outcome at 31st March 2010	Number of Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases
Open	1,256
Settled	23
Closed	87
Unknown	57
Total	1,423

- iii) During 2009/10, damages were awarded in 37 of the 110 clinical/social care negligence cases that were settled or closed, which related to claims lodged within the last three years.
- iv) The total amount spent in 2009/10 on all clinical/social care negligence cases lodged by patients in the last three years on defence and plaintiff costs was £620,340.

Vascular Dementia

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether domiciliary care is a realistic option for patients who suffer from severe vascular dementia; and if not, whether these patients could be cared for residentially rather than in hospital.

(AQW 1359/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's policy for all vulnerable elderly patients, including those who have vascular dementia, focuses on the need to support the person and their carers so that, as far as possible, the person can remain in their own home environment and maintain their independence.

However I also recognise that it will not be possible for everyone to be supported in their own home. Where this is not possible, it is the aim to ensure that everyone is supported in the environment that is right for their needs. This is done through a staged approach to care and support, with the

aim of maintaining daily living and independence. Hospital admission should be for assessment and treatment, not for longer term care.

Prescription Dispensing Rate

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current prescription dispensing rate for pharmacists.

(AQW 1372/11-15)

Mr Poots: As part of their professional practice, community pharmacist contractors receive a range of fees for dispensing health service prescriptions. Such fees payable to community pharmacist contractors in Northern Ireland are calculated on the basis of predicted dispensing episodes for the coming year against the resources available.

The NI Drug Tariff not only sets out the range of dispensing fees available to pharmacists but also details the reimbursement figures paid to pharmacy contractors towards the actual cost of the drugs and appliances supplied against an HS prescription form.

The NI Drug Tariff can be viewed on the Business Services Organisation's website at the following link:<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2034.htm>.

Prescription Dispensing Rate

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the twenty pharmacists who received the most money for dispensing prescriptions in each of the last three years, including their locations and the amount of money each received.

(AQW 1373/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health Service holds contracts with pharmacy contractors at each location and not individual pharmacists. Each pharmacy that dispenses Health Service prescriptions will have a contract. Therefore the twenty pharmacy contractors, at a premises level, that received the most money are detailed in Table 1. If a Pharmacy is sold then a new contract is set up.

The figures presented in Table 1 exclude appliance suppliers.

The contractor has been anonymised and if it appears in subsequent years, it has been labeled with the same label. For example, the contractor labeled 'A' received the most money in that Pharmacy in 2008/2009, 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

The data has been anonymised so the individual contractor cannot be identified and for this reason, the location has been defined as the Local Commissioning Group area.

The total amount paid includes reimbursement to contractors for ingredient costs of medicines, dispensing fees, professional fees and all other related payments.

TABLE 1

	2008/2009			2009/2010			2010/2011	
Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG	Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG	Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG
A	£3,319	N	A	£3,397	N	A	£3,485	N
B	£2,836	N	B	£2,947	N	G	£3,418	SE
C	£2,693	N	D	£2,937	N	H	£3,381	SE
D	£2,661	N	G	£2,913	SE	E	£3,178	Be

	2008/2009			2009/2010			2010/2011	
Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG	Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG	Label	Total Amount Paid £000'S	LCG
E	£2,602	Be	C	£2,884	N	C	£3,106	N
F	£2,423	SE	H	£2,884	SE	D	£3,045	N
G	£2,415	SE	E	£2,825	Be	B	£2,970	N
H	£2,325	SE	F	£2,575	SE	J	£2,764	Be
I	£2,199	Be	J	£2,559	Be	F	£2,760	SE
J	£2,192	Be	I	£2,360	Be	I	£2,498	Be
K	£1,950	S	Q	£2,114	N	U	£2,226	S
L	£1,883	W	S	£2,048	SE	V	£2,218	N
M	£1,878	N	K	£2,024	S	K	£2,193	S
N	£1,855	Be	N	£2,015	Be	N	£2,159	Be
O	£1,851	Be	L	£1,995	W	S	£2,141	SE
P	£1,823	W	U	£1,936	S	P	£2,137	W
Q	£1,808	N	V	£1,932	N	L	£2,129	W
R	£1,808	S	P	£1,897	W	Q	£2,128	N
S	£1,800	SE	T	£1,897	Be	X	£2,093	N
T	£1,752	Be	W	£1,877	S	Y	£2,067	SE

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit, BSO.

Location - Local Commissioning Group (LCG)

Be Belfast

N Northern

S Southern

SE South Eastern

W Western

Violence Against Hospital Staff

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many investigations are currently taking place into threats or violence against hospital staff by members of the public; (ii) where these incidents have taken place; and (iii) what his Department is doing to reduce such incidents.

(AQW 1374/11-15)

Mr Poots: All incidents are examined and, where appropriate, are subject to an internal investigation by the relevant HSC Trust, at the time or as soon as possible after the incident has been reported. Incidents take place across all care settings, with the majority taking place in a mental health or learning disability setting.

In order to reduce attacks, a number of measures have taken place within my Zero Tolerance policy. Responsibility for staff safety has been at senior executive level within organisations. In addition, there have been major publicity campaigns, both poster and badge campaigns in the HSC to a leaflet drop in rates bills to over 575,000 homes. There is also a joint memorandum of understanding in place with the Public Prosecution Service and the PSNI to ensure that there are clear lines of communication for staff and clarity on prosecution policies.

Most recently, my Department introduced new legislation – (Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008). This provides ‘Authorised Officers’ within HSC Trusts with the power to remove persons who cause nuisance and disturbance on HSC premises. It is hoped that early intervention by authorised officers will help prevent low level anti social behaviour from escalating into more serious attacks and that in future we will see a decrease in the number of incidents.

Hand Sanitizers

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust has spent on hand sanitizers in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1375/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health and Social Care Trusts continue to promote good hand hygiene amongst patients, staff and visitors as part of infection control measures. In Northern Ireland, since 2006/07, HSC Trusts have reduced Clostridium difficile cases by 62% and MRSA cases by 53%.

Food at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints have been received about the quality of the food at the Ulster Hospital in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1386/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of complaints received by HSC Trusts is collected quarterly by the DHSSPS. Complaints on the quality of hospital food are recorded under the category Hotel/Support/Security Services. This category includes all complaints referring to ancillary or support services e.g. portering, facilities, catering etc. It also refers to security issues e.g. stolen vehicles parked on Trust property.

The table below shows the number of complaint issues recorded under the category Hotel/Support/Security Services, for the South Eastern HSC Trust for each of the last three years. This information cannot be disaggregated any further.

COMPLAINT ISSUES RECEIVED BY SOUTH EASTERN HSC TRUST (2008/09 – 2010/11)

Subject of Complaint	Year		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11P
Hotel/Support/Security Services	10	10	5
All Complaints	734	977	1,183

Source: CH8

^P Data for 2010/11 is provisional

Care of Vulnerable Elderly People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will review the circumstances relating to the care of vulnerable elderly people to ensure that they are able to maintain contact with their friends and relatives and are safe and well looked after.

(AQW 1389/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is a function of all community Health and Social Care services to work together to enable vulnerable older people, among others, to remain in their own homes for as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so. As you know the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool, which is in the implementation process, aims to be truly person-centred seeking to identify the social care needs of the assessed person as well as encouraging the maintenance of relationships with friends and family.

School Nurses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1060/11-15, (i) which special schools in the Western Health and Social Care Trust are eligible for a school nurse; (ii) to outline the criteria used by the Trust to assess the nursing requirements for special schools; and (iii) to outline any circumstances when the Trust could decide to remove nursing provision from a special school.

(AQW 1400/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) All schools in Northern Ireland including all schools for children with special needs have a named school nurse. Through school nursing the school age population receive the universal child health promotion programme.
- (ii) Where children are educated in schools for children with special needs, the Western Trust advice is that they assess the needs of each child using the regionally agreed assessment tool for children with complex physical healthcare needs. This is used to develop individual care plans for each child. In most cases needs of children are met by classroom assistants who are trained to provide care such as administering medication. The Western Trust has a practice educator to support schools with training, advice and ongoing development and review of care plans. In addition, the Trust provides healthcare assistants, to provide care in schools for children who have been assessed as complex healthcare needs.
- (iii) The Trust assesses the needs of each school in relation to the changing needs of children in the school. The outcome of this process is used to develop a suitable model of care which in most cases involves the use of healthcare assistants in schools who work as part of the community paediatric nursing service and to which they remain accountable.

Abortions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 768/11-15, why deliberations on a Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy precludes the recording and collation of the reasons for abortions performed in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1418/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that there is no reason why deliberations on Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy precludes the recording and collation of the reasons for terminations of pregnancy performed in Northern Ireland.

As you will be aware, termination of pregnancy is a very difficult and controversial subject in Northern Ireland. I am currently considering a number of issues relating to this subject, including the question of whether more detail on terminations of pregnancy carried out in this province should be collected.

Suicide Prevention

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to help prevent suicide and to deal with its aftermath.

(AQW 1435/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department currently invests £6.7m per annum for the provision of suicide prevention services. Over £2m of this funding is allocated for community support, which includes the provision of suicide bereavement support services.

Specific action under Protect Life and through other services includes:

- Community-led suicide prevention and bereavement support services such as counselling and training;
- Establishment of Lifeline 24/7 crisis response helpline;
- Provision of Independent Schools Counselling and peer support via Youth Services in the aftermath of a young person's death;
- The Deliberate Self-Harm Registry which provides information to inform the delivery of accident and emergency services, and psychiatric follow up;
- Development of suicide cluster early identification and emergency community response plans;
- Local research into suicide and self harm;
- Regional training on suicide awareness and mental health first aid;
- All-island public awareness programmes, evaluation of training, and information sharing;
- Media monitoring;
- Education, awareness and support to address alcohol/substance misuse.

The causes of suicide are multifactorial and require sustained cross- departmental action. I am currently meeting with other Ministers to discuss progress on joint actions and how our departments can work collectively to address this issue. The "Protect Life" Strategy is also currently being "refreshed" to reflect the latest international evidence on effective practice.

Capital Projects in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1436/11-15)

Mr Poots: The following capital investment is planned in the North Down constituency in the next three years:

2011/12	Essential Maintenance and Refurbishment of Bangor Hospital
	Bangor Hospital Legionella Control
	Bangor Hospital Fire Safety
2012/13	No capital projects are currently planned
2013/14	Rationalisation of Day Care Services in North Down and Ards

Queen's Jubilee Medal

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to award the newly commissioned Queen's Jubilee Medal to staff in the NI Ambulance Service and the NI Fire and Rescue Service in line with other regions of the UK.

(AQW 1464/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that personnel in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services who meet the eligibility criteria will be awarded a medal in keeping with other regions of the UK. On 28 June 2011 the Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced details of who will be eligible for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal which includes emergency services personnel in paid service, retained or in a voluntary capacity who face the prospect of dealing with emergencies as part of their conditions of service.

Neurologist Appointment Waiting Times

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current waiting time for an appointment with a neurologist in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1466/11-15)

Mr Poots: The waiting time for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant in the neurology specialty at each Health and Social Care Trust is outlined in the table below. These data relate to the position at 31st March 2011, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available.

Health and Social Care Trust	Waiting time (in weeks)					Total
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 26	>26	
Belfast	797	237	226	653	0	1,913
Northern	243	90	111	293	170	907
South Eastern	140	70	49	154	15	428
Southern	234	67	0	0	0	301
Western	290	127	124	404	340	1,285
Northern Ireland	1,704	591	510	1,504	525	4,834

Source: Departmental Return CH3

Health Service Pension Scheme

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he would consider amending the terms of the Health Service Pension Scheme to allow unmarried long term partners to avail of pension payments in the event of the death of a partner.

(AQW 1497/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health Service Pension Regulations were amended in April 2008 to include provision for payment of survivors' benefits to nominated partners of deceased members and former member of the Scheme, provided the deceased member had contributed to the Scheme on or after 1 April 2008.

A Scheme member, who is not married or in a civil partnership, may make a nomination if they fulfil certain conditions, these are:

- they have lived with their partner in a permanent exclusive relationship for at least 2 years
- they are legally free to marry or enter a civil partnership
- the member and partner must be financially interdependent.

Music Therapy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider re-introducing full or partial funding for music therapy in special schools given the success of the project in the past.

(AQW 1507/11-15)

Mr Poots: Unfortunately, due to other pressures and priorities on my budget I am not in a position to provide funding for this project directly.

However, responsibility for the commissioning of services, including music therapy, rests with the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland and, therefore, any issues relating to funding should be directed to the Board.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current prevalence of myalgic encephalomyelitis.

(AQW 1519/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information regarding the prevalence of myalgic encephalomyelitis is not available.

Information is however available on the number of inpatient and day case admissions to hospitals with a diagnosis of myalgic encephalomyelitis during 2009/10, as shown in the table below.

HSC Provider	Number of Admissions
Belfast	48
Northern	5
South Eastern	11
Southern	10
Western	10
Northern Ireland Total	84

Source: Hospital Inpatients System.

It should be noted that any individual could have been admitted to hospital more than once during any given time period and would therefore be counted more than once in the above figures.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support is available to people diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis.

(AQW 1520/11-15)

Mr Poots: The variability of symptoms in patients with ME means that they will need to access different parts of the health service, depending on their specific symptoms and the severity of their condition. The focus on treatment is therefore centred on close co-operation between patients, carers and the relevant health and social care professionals, which is essential to ensure that sufferers obtain the most suitable treatment for their particular needs.

People suffering from ME in Northern Ireland have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in secondary, primary and community care settings, including neurology services and mental health services. In addition patients may be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their assessed individual needs.

In addition, my Department, in collaboration with the HSC Board, the Public Health Agency, Trusts and patient representatives groups, established a stakeholder group, to examine how access to the services required by ME sufferers might be improved. A number of meetings of this group have taken place and it was agreed that the issues being raised by the stakeholders were best handled in the context of service commissioning. The HSC Board advises that the relevant commissioning service team has now been asked to consider how best to engage with ME stakeholders and report to my Department on progress.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has identified all of Southern Cross Healthcare's landlords.

(AQW 1523/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not hold details of Southern Cross landlords who are based within the UK and overseas. The negotiations between Southern Cross Healthcare are continuing across the UK. My Department is monitoring these events closely.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a contingency plan is in place if Southern Cross Healthcare fails to reach an agreement with its landlords in September.

(AQW 1524/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department, together with the Health and Social Care Board, Health and Social Care Trusts and RQIA has been involved in preparing a series of contingency plans which are being kept under continuous review to follow events surrounding Southern Cross Healthcare. Our primary focus is the welfare of residents and their families.

Northern Ireland Dementia Centre

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given its success to date, whether he can give an assurance that funding for the Northern Ireland Dementia Centre will continue.

(AQW 1545/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has been contributing to the cost of a 3 year pilot of the Northern Ireland Dementia Services Development Centre, now in its third year. I will be considering, along with other funders, options for the future. Our considerations will be informed by an evaluation which is underway.

Departmental Dementia Strategy

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish his Department's dementia strategy.

(AQW 1546/11-15)

Mr Poots: Dementia care is an important issue facing us all in Northern Ireland. The expected increases in numbers of people with dementia will bring further pressures on our health and social care services.

Recognising these pressures my Department has developed and consulted on a regional strategy for improving dementia services. Given the current financial climate, I am giving careful consideration to realistic and meaningful options to progress implementation of the strategy.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has had to respond to calls regarding the land owned by

Invest NI which runs between the Donaghadee Road and the Bangor Road; and to detail the total cost of these call-outs.

(AQW 1553/11-15)

Mr Poots: There have been 10 occasions since 1 July 2010 when the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has responded to emergency callouts for fires in the proximity of the Donaghadee Road, Newtownards. NIFRS records do not identify the owners of the land where these incidents took place, but I am advised that the associated costs have averaged £2,500 per incident.

Department of Justice

Non-Molestation Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of prosecutions for breaches of Non-Molestation Orders in each court division, in each of the last three years; and (ii) of these, how many resulted in a custodial sentence.

(AQW 792/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The tables below documents the number prosecuted, number convicted and number sentenced to immediate custody for the offence 'Breach of Non-Molestation Order' by court division.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The tables cover the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

'BREACH OF NON-MOLESTATION ORDER' – NUMBER PROSECUTED, NUMBER CONVICTED AND NUMBER SENTENCED TO IMMEDIATE CUSTODY BY COURT DIVISION 2004

Court division	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted sentenced to custody
Antrim	55	35	2
Ards	49	35	2
Armagh and South Down	44	23	1
Belfast	114	72	5
Craigavon	41	27	3
Fermanagh and Tyrone	67	30	4
Londonderry	58	33	7
Total	428	255	24

'BREACH OF NON-MOLESTATION ORDER' – NUMBER PROSECUTED, NUMBER CONVICTED AND NUMBER SENTENCED TO IMMEDIATE CUSTODY BY COURT DIVISION 2005

Court division	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted sentenced to custody
Antrim	48	32	6
Ards	46	36	4

Court division	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted sentenced to custody
Armagh and South Down	50	33	1
Belfast	94	62	3
Craigavon	56	28	2
Fermanagh and Tyrone	26	19	2
Londonderry	67	43	6
Total	387	253	24

‘BREACH OF NON-MOLESTATION ORDER’ – NUMBER PROSECUTED, NUMBER CONVICTED AND NUMBER SENTENCED TO IMMEDIATE CUSTODY BY COURT DIVISION 2006

Court division	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted sentenced to custody
Antrim	84	47	5
Ards	57	31	3
Armagh and South Down	38	17	1
Belfast	89	63	3
Craigavon	37	19	3
Fermanagh and Tyrone	26	18	2
Londonderry	91	50	9
Total	422	245	26

Articles 1 to 12 of the April 2002 Agreement

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice whether articles 1 to 12 of the April 2002 agreement between the UK Government and the Government of Ireland on police co-operation have been fully implemented; and to provide details of their implementation.

(AQW 1009/11-15)

Mr Ford: Whilst the Department of Justice and Northern Ireland Policing Board have a role to play in the implementation of these articles, responsibility rests largely with the Chief Constable. His response to me in relation to each of the 12 Articles confirms my view that with the exception of Article 9 all articles have been implemented. Implementation of Article 9 is currently being finalised.

Please find below my response to each Article

Article 1 Eligibility to apply for posts

The Government provided temporary measures in the Police (NI) Act 2000 specifying that the Board and Chief Constable were to take such steps as they considered necessary to encourage applications from suitably qualified external (ie non PSNI) candidates. The Policing Board and Chief Constable are continuing to apply the criteria in relation to appointments.

No legislative measures were necessary to enable members of An Garda Síochána to apply for posts at ranks of above Inspector level in the PSNI. The PSNI are responsible for administrative measures and have advised that this has been implemented. The Policing Board has ensured that administrative

measures are in place to enable senior members of An Garda Síochána to apply for senior posts in the PSNI.

The introduction of measures to enable members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to apply for posts in the Garda Síochána is a matter for the Irish Government.

Article 2 Secondment with Policing Powers

The PSNI have advised that to date there has been one secondment of a superintendent for 12 months from An Garda Síochána to PSNI. The PSNI are currently giving consideration to extending the arrangements, which will see officers of Inspector rank and above being considered.

Article 3 Police Protocols

Protocols are in place regarding Articles 2, 5 and 8 (Secondments, Personal Exchanges and Disaster Planning). A Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between the PSNI and AGS in relation to Article 7 (Training) and a formal Code of Connection has been signed in relation to Article 10 (Communication). In relation to Article 9 (Joint Investigations) cross-border manuals are currently being finalised by PSNI, An Garda Síochána, the Public Prosecution Service (NI) and the Department of Public Prosecution (ROI).

Article 4 Annual Conference

A conference between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the An Garda Síochána takes place annually.

Article 5 Personnel Exchanges

From October 2005 a programme was introduced to facilitate members of the PSNI at Superintendent rank being placed in An Garda Síochána and members of An Garda Síochána being placed in the PSNI for periods not exceeding one year. In 2006 this was extended to Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors. The PSNI have advised that to date 64 members of the PSNI have been seconded to An Garda Síochána and 66 members of An Garda Síochána have been seconded to the PSNI.

Article 6 Liaison

Every District in the PSNI has a nominated liaison officer. The Operational Support Department of the PSNI also has a liaison officer.

Article 7 Training

Joint Training has been conducted in Crime, Public Order, Firearms and Leadership and Management. Two PSNI officers have completed An Garda Síochána Templemore courses for Senior Officer Training.

Article 8 Disaster Planning

The Cross Border Disaster protocol between PSNI and An Garda Síochána was signed by the PSNI Chief Constable and Garda Commissioner in January 2011. This document lays down response protocols and activities to ensure an effective and coordinated response is put in place to major incidents effecting both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland where a coordinated response between Services is required.

Article 9 Joint Investigations

Cross-border manuals are currently being finalised by PSNI, An Garda Síochána, the Public Prosecution Service (NI) and the Department of Public Prosecution (ROI). The manuals contain guidelines and general information in relation to the investigation of criminal acts which contain a significant cross-border element.

Article 10 Communications

PSNI has now established secure communications with An Garda Síochána at a number of key strategic sites on each side of the border. This provides direct operational communications between the two organisations.

There are no implementation issues in relation to Articles 11 and 12.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the cost of Legal Aid in relation to preliminary investigations; and (ii) how many preliminary investigations have been held in advance of a trial, broken down by court division.

(AQW 1040/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amounts paid for legal aid for preliminary investigations for each of the last three financial years is as follows:

Financial Year	Gross Total
2008/2009	£220,003
2009/2010	£1,552,404
2010/2011	£955,660

(Figures supplied by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission)

The number of preliminary investigations which have been held in advance of a trial broken down by court division are contained in the following table.

CALENDAR YEAR

	2008	2009	2010
Belfast	6	6	6
Londonderry	1	1	0
Antrim	5	2	2
Fermanagh and Tyrone	5	5	0
Armagh and South Down	5	6	7
Ards	2	1	1
Craigavon	0	4	3
Total	24	25	19

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 1078/11-15)

Mr Ford: An Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters provides a framework for formal North/South cooperation on criminal justice matters. It supports both Ministerial

meetings and meetings of a Working Group of officials that identify and progress areas in which criminal justice cooperation can be enhanced or initiated, as appropriate.

The main vehicle for supporting cooperation has been through a number of Project Advisory Groups (PAGs) which are made up of representatives of justice agencies from both sides of the border. The current suite of PAGs is tasked with considering cooperation around support for victims, public protection, management of sex offenders, youth justice, forensic science services and social diversity within the criminal justice system.

Notable recent developments flowing from this cooperation have included:

- agreement of a Forensic Science Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Forensic Science Northern Ireland and the Forensic Science Laboratory in the Republic of Ireland covering cooperation on a broad front, including arrangements for mutual support in the event of any major disruption of services;
- the organisation of a Public Protection Seminar in Dublin in November 2010 to highlight new initiatives, partnership in action, developments in restorative justice and areas of mutual interest;
- joint work between the Probation Board Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Irish Probation Service in preparation for the implementation of the European Community Framework Decisions on the Transfer of Prisoners and the Transfer of Probation Supervision;
- collaborative working between PBNI and the Probation Service to co-ordinate evaluation of a common Sex Offender Risk Assessment instrument in both jurisdictions;
- the ongoing exchange of ideas and best practice approaches in discussing and responding to the needs of victims both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and
- the high level of operational cooperation between agencies north and south around sex offenders who travel between the two jurisdictions.

Outside of the formal PAG structure, there is regular contact at an operational level between staff in justice agencies on both sides of the border. For example, officials meet on a quarterly basis with their counterparts from Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-based Violence.

The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) also jointly host a Cross Border Annual Organised Crime Seminar as well as producing a biennial Cross Border Organised Crime Threat Assessment outlining serious and organised crime in both jurisdictions.

Work also continues between the OCTF, DJE and law enforcement partners on both sides of the border to tackle drugs, fuel fraud, human trafficking, illegal dumping and money laundering. Members of law enforcement agencies in the Republic of Ireland are represented on some of the OCTF's subgroups.

Senior management of the Northern Ireland Prison Service also meets regularly with the Irish Prison Service. This provides an opportunity to exchange views on strategic issues, offer presentations on good practice, and arrange working level links. An example of effective partnership working has seen the development of staff interchange opportunities which have been of mutual benefit to both Prison Services.

The continued cooperation between justice agencies on both sides of the border will continue to be important and so at my most recent meeting with Alan Shatter TD, Minister of Justice and Equality which was held under the auspices of the IGA we agreed a new work programme which set out priorities for cross-border cooperation over the next twelve months. That programme of work includes a range of actions to provide support for victims and witnesses, enhance public protection and help speed up justice.

Legal Aid Rates

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether the refusal of solicitors or barristers to proceed with cases under the new Legal Aid rates represents a legal dereliction of duty to their clients.

(AQW 1087/11-15)

Mr Ford: Individual solicitors have the right to refuse to take on a potential client, whilst individual barristers can refuse to take instructions from a solicitor to represent a new client.

Where a defendant is committed for trial in the Crown Court, the proceedings in the Magistrates' Court come to an end and the defendant is technically no longer the client of the solicitor or barrister, if assigned. In these circumstances, where a solicitor or barrister chooses not to represent the defendant in the Crown Court, there is no breach of legal duty on their part.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department has spent on Special Advisers since 12 April 2010, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 1117/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice has one Special Adviser. Expenditure since 12 April 2010 is as follows:

- (i) Salary: The Special Adviser was paid in the pay band £57,300 to £82,531.
- (ii) Pension: To give detailed information on pension contributions paid would risk a disclosure under the Data Protection Act as the scheme / arrangement the member is in is personal information. There are two schemes that can apply, the Premium / Nuvos scheme or the Partnership Scheme.

For a member in the Premium / Nuvos scheme in the above salary band, the contribution rate is as follows:

Salary Band	Annual Full Time Equivalent Pensionable Salary 2010/11	Employers' ASLC Charge
	£ pa	% of salary
3	46,900 to 100,999	23.5

The Partnership pension scheme contribution rates are as follows:

Age at last 6 April	% Rate contribution
Under 21	3
21 to 25	4.5
26 to 30	6.5
31 to 35	8
36 to 40	10
41 to 45	11.5
46 or over	12.5

There is a matching employer contribution of up to 3% and 0.8% payable to the PCSPS (NI) for risk benefits.

- (iii) Expenses: No expenses were claimed by the Special Adviser in 2010/11.

- (iv) Office costs: There were no incremental office costs as the Special Adviser used existing accommodation.
- (v) Other costs: It is not possible to disclose other costs that may have been incurred by the Special Adviser because this information is not recorded in a way that makes disclosure possible. Any other costs would be included within the general running costs of the Minister's office.

Convictions for Consuming Alcohol Whilst Underage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many young people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for consuming alcohol whilst underage in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1144/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number prosecuted and number convicted for the offence 'consuming intoxicating liquor while a minor' and other related offences for which juveniles (aged 10-17) were convicted.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The table covers the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

NUMBER OF JUVENILES (AGED 10-17) PROSECUTED AND CONVICTED FOR THE OFFENCES 'CONSUMING INTOXICATING LIQUOR WHILE A MINOR', 'SIMPLE DRUNK' AND 'FAILING TO SURRENDER ALCOHOL TO A CONSTABLE' 2004-2006

Offence	2004	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Consuming intoxicating liquor while a minor	10	8
Simple drunk	1	1
Failing to surrender alcohol to a constable	0	0
Total	11	9

Offence	2005	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Consuming intoxicating liquor while a minor	8	7
Simple drunk	1	1
Failing to surrender alcohol to a constable	1	1
Total	10	9

Offence	2006	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Consuming intoxicating liquor while a minor	12	9
Simple drunk	1	1
Failing to surrender alcohol to a constable	0	0
Total	13	10

Note:

- 1 Any prosecutions and convictions for 'simple drunk' and 'failing to surrender alcohol to a constable' cover only those aged 10-17. Some individuals prosecuted and convicted for 'consuming intoxicating liquor while a minor' were no longer a minor at point of conviction and sentence; they have, however, been included in the table as the offence definition identifies the individuals as having consumed alcohol while underage

Convictions for Selling Alcohol to Young People

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for selling alcohol to young people who are underage in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1145/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number prosecuted and number convicted for selling intoxicating liquor to a minor.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The table covers the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

NUMBER PROSECUTED AND NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SELLING INTOXICATING LIQUOR TO A MINOR 2004-2006

Year	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
2004	7	2
2005	8	3
2006	6	3

Convictions for Permitting Alcohol to be Consumed by Young People

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for (a) permitting alcohol to be consumed by young people who are underage; and (b) procuring alcohol for young people who are underage, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1148/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number prosecuted and number convicted for permitting the consumption of alcohol by a minor, purchasing alcohol for a minor and other related offences.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The table covers the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

Number prosecuted and number convicted for permitting the consumption of alcohol by a minor, purchasing alcohol for a minor and other related offences by offence 2004-2006

Offence	2004	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Permitting minor to unlawfully consume alcohol	1	1

Offence	2004	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Permitting minor to consume alcohol in licensed premises	0	0
Purchasing intoxicating liquor for a minor	0	0
Purchasing alcohol for delivery to a minor	0	0
Delivering intoxicating liquor to a minor	1	1
Allowing minor on licensed premises	2	1
Total	4	3

Offence	2005	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Permitting minor to unlawfully consume alcohol	0	0
Permitting minor to consume alcohol in licensed premises	5	0
Purchasing intoxicating liquor for a minor	4	3
Purchasing alcohol for delivery to a minor	3	3
Delivering intoxicating liquor to a minor	0	0
Allowing minor on licensed premises	4	4
Total	16	10

Offence	2006	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Permitting minor to unlawfully consume alcohol	0	0
Permitting minor to consume alcohol in licensed premises	0	0
Purchasing intoxicating liquor for a minor	1	1
Purchasing alcohol for delivery to a minor	0	0
Delivering intoxicating liquor to a minor	0	0

Offence	2006	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Allowing minor on licensed premises	2	2
Total	3	3

Convictions for Possession of Indecent Images of Children

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years, to detail how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for the possession of indecent images/pseudo images of children in each court division; and of these how many received a custodial sentence.

(AQW 1196/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number prosecuted, number convicted and the number given a custodial sentence for the possession of indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of a child or children by court division.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The table covers the calendar years 2002 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

POSSESSION OF INDECENT PHOTOGRAPHS OR PSEUDO PHOTOGRAPHS OF A CHILD(REN) – NUMBER PROSECUTED, NUMBER CONVICTED AND NUMBER GIVEN A CUSTODIAL SENTENCE BY COURT DIVISION 2002-2006

Year	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted given a custodial sentence
2002	0	0	0
2003			
Antrim	1	0	0
Belfast	1	1	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	1	0
Londonderry	1	1	0
Total	4	3	0
2004¹			
Ards	1	1	1
Craigavon	1	1	0
Total	2	2	1
2005			
Ards	1	0	0
Belfast	2	1	1

Year	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number convicted given a custodial sentence
Craigavon	1	1	0
Total	4	2	1
2006			
Londonderry	1	0	0
Total	1	0	0

- 1 Includes one prosecution and one conviction for the possession of indecent photograph(s) / pseudo photograph(s) of children with a view to distribution.

Security Industry Authority

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department intends to take over the powers and responsibilities of the Security Industry Authority; and if so, what is the timescale involved.

(AQW 1197/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of the review of public bodies the UK Government decided that the Security Industry Authority (SIA) should eventually cease to be a Non Departmental Public Body and that an alternative regulatory regime for the private security industry should be introduced.

I have commenced a review of the future shape of the private security industry in Northern Ireland, with the objective of ensuring that decisions on its regulation can be based upon Northern Ireland specific evidence.

I am committed to working closely with the industry, the Justice Committee, the Executive, the UK and Scottish Governments to develop policy options for the future regulation of the private security industry in Northern Ireland.

I intend to circulate an initial discussion paper on the issue in the autumn and I anticipate that this will be followed by public consultation.

Prisoner Pre-Release Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 652/11-15, (i) how the prisoner was able to progress to Phase Two of the pre-release scheme, given that he had breached prison rules which ultimately led to his recall to Maghaberry Prison; (ii) who or what agencies were responsible for monitoring and assessing the prisoner upon his release; and (iii) whether he has been recalled to prison at any other time in the past.

(AQW 1207/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The prisoner in question had successfully completed Phase One of the pre-release scheme prior to progression to Phase Two of the pre-release scheme. The prisoner breached prison rules whilst on Phase Two of the pre-release scheme and he was then returned to Maghaberry Prison.
- (ii) Staff from the Prisoner Assessment Unit and staff from PBNI are responsible for monitoring and assessing the prisoner on his release.
- (iii) The prisoner in question has been recalled to the prison on two other occasions, namely March 2008 and July 2009.

Breaching of Prison Rules

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 648/11-15, (i) which prison rules were breached on (a) 7 April 2011; (b) 17 April 2011; and (c) 18 April 2011; and (ii) how many prisoners were involved on each occasion.

(AQW 1208/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) a. The incident on 7 April involved a breach of Prison Rule 38 (19)(a), which relates to failed alcohol tests. Two further incidents occurred on 17 April and 18 April, respectively. In each of these cases the behaviour of the prisoners involved fell short of that required to demonstrate trust and an ability to live in low supervision and temporary release settings and as such involved breaches of the Prisoner Assessment Unit's internal protocols.
- (ii) Two prisoners were involved in the first incident on 7 April. The incidents on 17 and 18 April each involved one prisoner.

DOJ: Procurement

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to procurement by his Department, (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1226/11-15)

Mr Ford: On its formation on 12 April 2010, the Department of Justice continued to use the policy that was in use at the point of devolution, where Single Tender Actions were required to be signed off by NICS Grade 7 or above.

On 17 June 2010, DFP issued guidance which required Accounting Officer approval of Single Tender Actions. From 19 October 2010, DoJ required the appropriate Accounting Officer to authorise STA's below £100,000. Any Single Tender Action that was over this threshold would have to be approved by the Departmental Accounting Officer.

From 26 May 2011, further guidance was issued and DoJ moved to a system whereby the Departmental Accounting Officer approved all Single Tender Actions with the exception that the Chief Constable has retained delegated authority to approve Single Tender Actions up to £100,000.

The table below details when a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer.

Business Area	Expenditure	Supplier	Reasons	Date of Approval
DoJ	£3,037.70	Patricia Gordon (Consultancy)	Need for urgent action for reasons outwith the control of the contracting authority	Submitted for approval on 30 June 2011.
Prison Service	£106,000.00	Name of contractor withheld for security reasons	Access control electronic hand reader, locking, pass system, 3 sites	Approval obtained 27 June 2011

Business Area	Expenditure	Supplier	Reasons	Date of Approval
Prison Service	£100,000.00	Name of contractor withheld for security reasons	CCTV equipment maintenance	Approval obtained 27 June 2011

Young People Prosecuted and Convicted for Burglary

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many young people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for burglary offences in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 1255/11-15)

Mr Ford: The tables below give the number of juveniles (aged 10-17) prosecuted and convicted for burglary offences by court division.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The tables cover the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

BURGLARY - NUMBER OF JUVENILES (AGED 10-17) PROSECUTED AND CONVICTED BY COURT DIVISION 2004-2006

Court division	2004	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	14	10
Ards	27	22
Armagh and South Down	18	13
Belfast	45	36
Craigavon	16	12
Fermanagh and Tyrone	12	11
Londonderry	27	19
Total	159	123

Court division	2005	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	20	18
Ards	20	14
Armagh and South Down	14	8
Belfast	51	39
Craigavon	18	13
Fermanagh and Tyrone	5	5
Londonderry	20	16
Total	148	113

Court division	2006	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	14	12
Ards	31	18
Armagh and South Down	3	3
Belfast	30	19
Craigavon	13	11
Fermanagh and Tyrone	16	13
Londonderry	5	5
Total	112	81

Convictions for Armed Robbery

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) adults; and (ii) young people have been (a) prosecuted; and (b) convicted for armed robbery in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 1257/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available. Court conviction data do not contain background information in relation to offences committed and it is therefore not possible to separate out the number prosecuted and convicted for armed robbery from other robbery offences.

Selling Alcohol Outside Licensing Hours

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for selling alcohol outside licensing hours, broken down by court division.

(AQW 1259/11-15)

Mr Ford: The tables below give the number prosecuted and number convicted for selling intoxicating liquor outside licensing hours and other related offences by court division.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included. The tables cover the calendar years 2004 to 2006, the latest year for which figures are currently available. This was due to changes in how such data are collected but steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive data for subsequent years. It is hoped information for the period 2007 to 2009 will be available for the new Assembly session in September; work on data for 2010 is also progressing in parallel.

SELLING INTOXICATING LIQUOR OUTSIDE HOURS AND OTHER RELATED OFFENCES - NUMBER PROSECUTED AND NUMBER CONVICTED BY COURT DIVISION 2004-2006

2004

Court division	Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours		Permitting consumption / supply of intoxicating liquor outside hours	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	1	0	2	2
Ards	1	1	0	0

Court division	Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours		Permitting consumption / supply of intoxicating liquor outside hours	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Armagh and South Down	0	0	3	3
Belfast	16	13	35	25
Craigavon	2	2	3	3
Fermanagh and Tyrone	3	0	2	1
Londonderry	4	4	8	5
Total	27	20	53	39

2005

Court division	Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours		Permitting consumption / supply of alcohol outside hours	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	1	0	3	2
Ards	2	2	6	5
Armagh and South Down	2	2	2	2
Belfast	1	1	4	4
Craigavon	1	0	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	2	13	11
Londonderry	1	1	3	2
Total	10	8	31	26

2006

Court division	Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours		Permitting consumption / supply of alcohol outside hours	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Antrim	1	1	0	0
Ards	2	1	2	1
Armagh and South Down	1	1	7	5
Belfast	1	1	0	0
Craigavon	0	0	0	0

Court division	Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours		Permitting consumption / supply of alcohol outside hours	
	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
Fermanagh and Tyrone	7	7	30	27
Londonderry	1	1	2	2
Total	13	12	41	35

Domestic Violence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given the possibility of perpetrators of domestic violence reoffending and attempting to coerce victims into withdrawing statements or complaints made to the police, for his assessment of whether it would be more appropriate to treat domestic violence incidents as charge sheet rather than postal summons which should speed up the process, limit opportunities for interference and enhance successful prosecutions.

(AQW 1260/11-15)

Mr Ford: The decision as to whether to charge or not for any offence is enshrined in statute, specifically Article 38 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989. In any investigation, including domestic violence incidents, PSNI need to determine from the evidence whether there is a realistic prospect of a conviction. This essentially is the threshold to achieve in order to allow PSNI to proceed with charging an alleged perpetrator of domestic violence.

Therefore in accordance with current legislation, the evidence relating to all incidents including domestic abuse situations, must be determined on its own merits and I am satisfied with current practice.

Countryside Arson

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been convicted of countryside arson in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1266/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available. Court conviction data do not contain background information in relation to offences committed and it is therefore not possible to separate out the number of convictions for arson in the countryside from other arson offences.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of Legal Aid paid out in each of the last three years was granted on the grounds of a language barrier, broken down by court division.

(AQW 1298/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal Aid is not normally granted on the basis of a person needing an interpreter and accordingly the information requested is not collected. If a person before the courts requires an interpreter one will be provided by the court.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 681/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the Legal Aid paid out for each defendant.

(AQW 1299/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Legal Aid payments for each defendant are set out in the table below.

Defendant	Criminal Green Form PACE fees	VAT	Total Criminal Green Form PACE fees	Criminal Magistrates' Court Fees	VAT	Total Magistrates' Court Fees	Criminal Crown Court Fees	VAT	Total Crown Court Fees	Total:
Defendant 1	104.27	18.25	122.52	970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,286.52
Defendant 2				820.00	164.00	984.00				984.00
Defendant 3	97.42	16.05	113.47	820.00	164.00	984.00				1,097.47
Defendant 4	141.12	24.70	165.82	1,045.00	209.00	1,254.00				1,419.82
Defendant 5	43.25	7.57	50.82	1,338.76	267.75	1,606.51				1,657.33
Defendant 6	46.95	8.22	55.17	895.00	179.00	1,074.00	1,331.10	266.22	1,597.32	2,726.49
Defendant 7	103.54	18.12	121.66	895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,195.66
Defendant 8	57.67	10.09	67.76	895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,141.76
Defendant 9	42.10	7.37	49.47	1,120.00	224.00	1,344.00				1,393.47
Defendant 10	52.83	9.25	62.08	895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,136.08
Defendant 11				895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,074.00
Defendant 12				895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,074.00
Defendant 13	78.28	15.66	93.94	895.00	179.00	1,074.00				1,167.94
Defendant 14				1,270.00	254.00	1,524.00				1,524.00
Defendant 15	97.31	17.03	114.34	0.00						114.34
Defendant 16				1,185.00	237.00	1,422.00				1,422.00
Defendant 17				970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,164.00
Defendant 18	204.16	35.60	239.76	970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,403.76
Defendant 19				970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,164.00
Defendant 20				1,877.16	375.43	2,252.59				2,252.59

Defendant	Criminal Green Form PACE fees	VAT	Total Criminal Green Form PACE fees	Criminal Magistrates' Court Fees	VAT	Total Magistrates' Court Fees	Criminal Crown Court Fees	VAT	Total Crown Court Fees	Total:
Defendant 21	159.50	26.91	186.41	970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,350.41
Defendant 22	140.09	24.14	164.23	1,045.00	209.00	1,254.00				1,418.23
Defendant 23				970.00	194.00	1,164.00	1,331.10	266.22	1,597.32	2,761.32
Defendant 24	106.90	18.71	125.61	1,019.69	203.94	1,223.63				1,349.24
Defendant 25				820.00	164.00	984.00				984.00
Defendant 26	78.28	14.68	92.96	970.00	194.00	1,164.00				1,256.96
	1,553.67	272.35	1,826.02	25,415.61	5,083.12	30,498.73	2,662.20	532.44	3,194.64	35,519.39

Notes

1. The total paid to date in respect of representation in the Magistrates' Court remains at £30,498.73 inclusive of VAT.
2. The total paid in respect of representation in the Crown Court remains at £3,194.64 inclusive of VAT.
3. In the previous AQ (681/11-15) the total for Green Form/PACE payments was £433.59 based on claims being paid in respect of 4 defendants. The Green Form/PACE total payment has increased to £1,826.02 as fees have now been paid in a total of 16 cases.
4. The Green Form/PACE figures may not be comprehensive as, in some instances, the claims for payment do not include details of the date of the incident and it has not been possible to confirm these claims arise out of the incident which is the subject of this AQ.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether translator fees are paid from the Legal Aid budget in cases where Legal Aid has been granted.

(AQW 1306/11-15)

Mr Ford: For the purposes of this answer the term translator includes interpreter.

Where a non-English speaking, or deaf or hearing impaired defendant or party to court proceedings has been granted legal aid, the costs associated with interpreting services may be recouped as a disbursement from the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

Where an interpreter is appointed in accordance with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) Interpreters Policy, generally for in-court interpreter services, the costs will be met by NICTS regardless of whether legal aid has been granted. In criminal cases, the PSNI pays interpreter costs for the first court appearance and the NICTS as required for each subsequent appearance.

Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 650/11-15, to detail the provisions of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 that deal with prisoners being released on licence and the revoking of such licences.

(AQW 1312/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (the 2008 Order) makes provision for the release of offenders on licence and creates a power to recall such offenders to custody, where necessary. Details of the relevant provisions are available on the UK Government legislation website at: www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2008/1216/contents

The Criminal Justice (Sentencing)(Licence Conditions) (Northern Ireland) Rules 2009 Rules set out the standard licence conditions prescribed for the purposes of Article 24(1) of the 2008 Order. The rules are available on the UK Government legislation website at: www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2009/81/made

Police Ombudsman's Report on the Killing of Six Men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Police Ombudsman's report on the killing of six men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994.

(AQW 1315/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Police Ombudsman for investigating this difficult case. I also recognise the unhappiness of the victims' families with the initial police investigation. The Chief Constable has stated publically his great sadness and frustration for all those involved in policing, that those responsible for this horrific crime have never been brought to justice, and that the PSNI remain firmly committed to apprehending those responsible for these murders.

Police Ombudsman's Report on the Killing of Six Men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the (i) Police Ombudsman; (ii) Chair and members of the Policing Board; and (iii) Chief Constable in relation to the findings of the Police Ombudsman's report on the killing of six men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994.

(AQW 1319/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have had no discussions with the (i) Police Ombudsman; (ii) Chair and members of the Policing Board; or (iii) Chief Constable in relation to the findings of the Police Ombudsman's report on the killing of six men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994.

Investigation into the Killing of Six Men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable in relation to the on-going investigation into the killing of six men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994 and the bringing forward of convictions.

(AQW 1320/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have had no discussions with the Chief Constable in relation to the ongoing investigation into the killing of six men at O'Toole's Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994 and the bringing forward of convictions. I am aware however that the PSNI remain firmly committed to apprehending those responsible for these murders.

Legal Costs Recovered from Assets of Defendants

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to ensure that in criminal cases the legal costs are recovered from any assets of defendants who are found guilty.

(AQW 1332/11-15)

Mr Ford: Provision was taken in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to introduce Recovery of Defence Costs Orders. These orders would be made against legally aided defendants whom, having been convicted, the court considers have sufficient funds to pay all, or a proportion, of the costs of their defence. Plans to introduce this process are at an early stage and I will bring forward my proposals for consideration by the Assembly in due course.

Convictions: 12 July 2010 riots in Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the convictions each person has received in relation to the 12th July 2010 riots in Belfast.

(AQW 1343/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides a breakdown of the offences for which each individual was convicted in relation to the 12th July 2010 riots in Belfast and the disposals given to those sentenced.

Defendant Number	Offence	Outcome
1	Obstructing lawful activity	Community Service Order 100 hours
	Assault Police	Community Service Order 100 hours (concurrent)
2	Riot	Youth Conference Order
3	Riot	Youth Conference Order
4	Making Petrol Bomb	Youth Conference Order
5	Riot	Youth Conference Order
6	Riot	Combination Order (Community Service Order 100 hours & Probation Order 2 years)
7	Riot x 2	Youth Conference Order x 2
	Throwing Petrol Bomb	Youth Conference Order
	Possess Offensive Weapon	Youth Conference Order
8	Riot	Youth Conference Order
	Riotous Behaviour	Youth Conference Order
9	Riot	Youth Conference Order

Defendant Number	Offence	Outcome
10	Riot	Juvenile Justice Centre Order 8 months
11	Riotous Behaviour	Youth Conference Order
	Riot	Youth Conference Order
12	Obstructing lawful activity	Fine £250
13	Throwing Petrol Bomb	Awaiting Sentence
	Possessing Petrol Bomb	Awaiting Sentence
14	Riot	21 Months Imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 12 Months on Licence. Licence conditions include managing alcohol programme
	Criminal Damage	21 Months Imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 12 Months on Licence. Licence conditions include managing alcohol programme Concurrent
15	Riot	Convicted and remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11 for sentence
	Criminal Damage	Convicted and remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11 for sentence
	Arson	Convicted and remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11 for sentence
	Take Motor Vehicle Without Consent	Convicted and remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11 for sentence
	Attempted Assault	Convicted and remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11 for sentence
16	Riot	8 Months Imprisonment
17	Riot	10 Months Imprisonment
18	Riot	21 Months Imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 12 Months on Licence. Licence conditions include alcohol/drug counselling and/or treatment programme
	Criminal Damage	21 Months Imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 12 Months on Licence. Licence conditions include alcohol/drug counselling and/or treatment programme. Concurrent
19	Riot	21 Months Imprisonment; 10 Months 2 weeks Determinate Custodial Sentence and on licence for 10 Months 2 weeks
	Criminal Damage	21 Months Imprisonment; 10 Months 2 weeks Determinate Custodial Sentence and on licence for 10 Months 2 weeks. Concurrent

Defendant Number	Offence	Outcome
20	Riot	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
21	Riot	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
	Criminal Damage	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
	Arson	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
	Throwing Petrol Bomb	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
	Take Motor Vehicle Without Consent	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned to 5th Sep 11
22	Riot	Remanded in custody until 30th Aug 11 for sentence
	Attempted Criminal Damage	Remanded in custody until 30th Aug 11 for sentence. Concurrent
23	Riot	Combination Order; Community Service Order 100 Hours + Probation Order for 1 year 6 months
24	Riot	18 Months imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 9 Months on licence
	Attempted Criminal Damage	18 Months imprisonment; 9 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 9 Months on licence. Concurrent
25	Riot	4 Years Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Sentence 2 years & 2 years on Licence
	Attempted Grievous Bodily Harm With Intent	4 Years Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Sentence 2 years & 2 years on Licence. Concurrent
26	Riot	30 Months imprisonment; 1 Year 3 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 1 Year 3 Months on Licence
	Attempted Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm	30 Months imprisonment; 1 Year 3 Months Determinate Custodial Sentence and 1 Year 3 Months on Licence. Concurrent
27	Riot	Community Service Order 200 Hours
28	Riot	Community Service Order 200 Hours
29	Riot	9 Months Imprisonment Suspended for 2 Years
30	Riot	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned; to 30th Aug 11 for sentence
	Throwing Petrol Bomb	Convicted; remanded in custody; adjourned; to 30th Aug 11 for sentence
31	Riot	Community Service Order 240 hours

Defendant Number	Offence	Outcome
32	Riot	Community Service Order 240 hours
33	Riot	Convicted – bail varied; adding no alcohol condition, defendant is not to enter Belfast, residency condition, curfew condition and amending condition regarding defendant not coming within one mile of any parade. Adjourned to 5th Sept 11.
34	Riot	1 Year Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Sentence 6 Months & 6 Months on Licence
35	Riot	Convicted; Remanded in Custody 9th Sept 11 for sentence
	Riot	Convicted; Remanded in Custody 9th Sept 11 for sentence
	Throwing Petrol Bomb	Convicted; Remanded in Custody 9th Sept 11 for sentence
36	Riot	Remanded in Custody 12th Sept 11 for sentence
37	Riot	Convicted; bail varied – to appear again 5th September 11
38	Riot	4 Years Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Licence of 2 Years & 2 Years on Licence. Licence conditions include alcohol/drug counselling and/or treatment programme
	Throwing Petrol Bomb	4 Years Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Licence of 2 Years & 2 Years on Licence. Licence conditions include alcohol/drug counselling and/or treatment programme Concurrent
39	Riot	21 Months Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Sentence of 9 Months & 12 Months on Licence
	Attempted Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm	21 Months Imprisonment; Determinate Custodial Sentence of 9 Months & 12 Months on Licence. Concurrent

Notes

Offences arising from two incidents in Belfast (Ardoyne) during 12th July period 2010.

Outcomes relate to offences where there was a conviction or finding of guilt.

Prisoner Wrongly Released from Maghaberry Prison

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) why it was not realised or made public until late on Monday 27 June 2011 that a prisoner had been wrongly released from Maghaberry Prison on Friday 24 June 2011; (ii) when prison staff alerted police to the situation; and (iii) where the prisoner was arrested.

(AQW 1366/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) An investigation is still ongoing into the circumstances of the erroneous release of George Damien McFerran and why the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) did not become aware of the error until Monday 27 June.

NIPS was made aware of the situation at 1320 hours on 27 June. Steps were then taken to confirm that Mr McFerran was unlawfully at large and plans were immediately put in place to have him re-arrested. Mr McFerran was returned to custody in Maghaberry at 1750 hours on the same day. The press statement was released soon after.

- (ii) NIPS staff contacted the Maghaberry PSNI Liaison Officer at 1415 hours on 27 June to confirm that Mr McFerran was unlawfully at large and to make plans for his re-arrest and return to prison.
- (iii) Mr McFerran was arrested in Bridge Street, Larne at 1642 hours on 27 June.

Traffic Police: Close Protection Unit Duties

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he is aware of any plans to move traffic police to close protection unit duties.

(AQW 1367/11-15)

Mr Ford: The management of police resources, including the allocation of duties, is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Castlereagh Police Station

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he is aware of any plans for the future of Castlereagh Police Station.

(AQW 1368/11-15)

Mr Ford: The future of Castlereagh police station is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to follow the proposals in England and Wales to withdraw Legal Aid funding for family court proceedings which have a criminal content, given that such matter would normally be granted Legal Aid at a magistrate's court.

(AQW 1382/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 13 September 2010 I announced a fundamental Review of Access to Justice in Northern Ireland. A Review Team was established to examine all areas of Legal Aid. The Team was asked to include in its consideration the changes proposed for England and Wales. I expect to be in receipt of the final report at the end of July and will publish a formal response to the Review in due course.

Former RUC Personnel: Historical Enquiries

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice what action he intends to take in relation to former RUC personnel who refuse to help with historic enquiries.

(AQW 1421/11-15)

Mr Ford: As with any other member of the public, there is no legal obligation on former RUC personnel to assist with historical enquiries conducted by the HET or the office of the Police Ombudsman. Whether former officers should be compelled to assist the work of the Police Ombudsman is a question

that I understand the Ombudsman will want to consider in the context of his forthcoming Five-Year Review of the legislation governing his office.

Capital Projects for North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1442/11-15)

Mr Ford: The only capital project planned for the North Down constituency by the Department of Justice during the next three years is provision of new locker accommodation at Bangor PSNI Station scheduled for 2011/12.

Legal Aid Granted to EU Defendants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether there is any provision to recoup Legal Aid granted to EU defendants, residing in Northern Ireland, from their country of origin.

(AQW 1459/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no provision to enable Legal Aid costs to be recouped from EU defendants residing in Northern Ireland.

Queen's Jubilee Medal

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to award the newly commissioned Queen's Jubilee Medal to police and prison staff, in line with other regions of the UK.

(AQW 1461/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with other regions of the UK, eligible police and prison staff in Northern Ireland will receive the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount of Legal Aid granted to foreign national defendants in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1462/11-15)

Mr Ford: Details of the nationality of defendants in receipt of criminal legal aid are not held by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission. It is therefore not possible to answer this question.

Firearms Used to Kill Six Men at the Heights Bar, Loughinisland

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice to detail any reports he has received from the Chief Constable, or senior police personnel, in relation to the assessment of the (i) firearms; and (ii) ballistics history of the firearms used to kill six men at the Heights Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994.

(AQW 1469/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not received any reports from the Chief Constable, or senior police personnel, in relation to the assessment of the (i) firearms; and (ii) ballistics history of the firearms used to kill six men at the Heights Bar, Loughinisland on 18 June 1994.

Legal Aid Bill

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how much of the Legal Aid bill in each of the last five years was paid (i) to barristers; (ii) to solicitors; and (iii) for administration.

(AQW 1478/11-15)

Mr Ford:

Financial Year	Solicitor's fees £m	VAT on solicitors fees £m	Solicitor's disbursements £m	Total £m
2006/07	27.8	4.8	6.3	38.9
2007/08	31.9	5.6	6.9	44.4
2008/09	36.8	6.5	6.8	50.1
2009/10	39.5	6.2	7.7	53.4
2010/11	44.9	7.7	8.1	60.7

Financial Year	Barrister's fees £m	VAT on barrister's fees £m	Barrister's disbursements £m	Total £m
2006/07	26.3	4.2	0	30.5
2007/08	23.9	3.7	0	27.6
2008/09	28.8	4.2	0	33.0
2009/10	38.0	5.5	0	43.5
2010/11	28.7	3.9	0	32.6

Financial Year	2006/07 £m	2007/08 £m	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m
Administration expenditure	5.5	5.7	6.7	7.4	7.8

Notes:

- i) Legal Aid and administration expenditure is stated on a cash basis.
- ii) Legal Aid expenditure is stated net of contributions received and includes disbursements.
- iii) The administration costs are inclusive of VAT.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice, given the delay in establishing the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, whether he intends to introduce legislation to enable councils to fill the current vacancies.

(AQW 1493/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) will be fully established by April 2012, with many aspects coming into being well before that date. Such milestones include the nomination of elected members in September 2011 and the appointment of independent members early in 2012. This is broadly in line with previous timescales for the reconstitution of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) following a local government election, but still allows for thorough preparatory work to be carried out.

I understand that the issue of vacancies on DPPs is affecting a number of councils; however, I have no plans to enact or amend legislation to ensure any vacancies can be filled.

I would encourage all councils to take advantage of this transitional period in order to continue with their own preparations in advance of the formal commencement of PCSPs, particularly around joint

working between Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and DPPs. This may provide scope to alleviate any short-term difficulties that councils may have regarding political representation on DPPs.

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice when he will publish the reports by (i) Tony McCusker; and (ii) Michael Maguire in relation to the performance of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1495/11-15)

Mr Ford: The report by Tony McCusker which looked into the claims of interference by DOJ officials was published on Thursday 30 June.

Michael Maguire, the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice, is currently completing the report of his investigation into the relationship between the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, with a view to finalising it before the end of the summer. I intend to agree to its publication when the Assembly returns.

KEEP SAFE (Kilcooley Education and Enforcement Programme with Substance Awareness for Everyone)

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to implement the KEEP SAFE (Kilcooley Education and Enforcement Programme with Substance Awareness for Everyone) to other areas.

(AQW 1508/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has not funded Keep Safe (Kilcooley Education and Enforcement Programme with Substance Awareness for Everyone). I understand however, that the initiative has been supported by the PSNI and the local District Policing Partnership who are perhaps better placed to comment on future plans.

Marion Price/McGlinchey

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Marion Price/McGlinchey is a separated prisoner and if she has signed the required compact.

(AQW 1509/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current eligibility criteria for separated accommodation does not apply to female prisoners. However arrangements to amend the criteria to apply to both male and female prisoners are underway.

Ms McGlinchey has applied for separation and her application is currently being processed in the normal way. However all decisions about entry into separated accommodation are reserved to the Secretary of State and so it will fall to him to make a decision in relation to Ms McGlinchey's status.

This being the case, Ms McGlinchey has not yet signed the separated compact.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how much Legal Aid has been paid to date in relation to the case of Gerry McGeough who was convicted of attempted murder, and other related offences; and (ii) to detail the cost, or an estimate, of the Legal Aid paid to date in relation to Gerry McGeough's judicial review to seek a Royal Prerogative of Mercy from Her Majesty the Queen in relation to these offences.

(AQW 1511/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Terence Gerry McGeough was granted criminal Legal Aid for representation in the Magistrates' Court, the Crown Court and for High Court bail applications.

All claims have been received and paid for representation in the Magistrates' Court amounting to £9,396.45 (inc VAT) for solicitor and £2,002.49 (inc VAT) for counsel.

Fees have also been paid to the solicitor for three High Court bail applications amounting to £2,574.82 (inc VAT).

To date, claims received under PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) have totalled £2,188.48 (inc VAT and a disbursement).

As this case was deemed to fall within the criteria of a Very High Cost case, the determination of the Crown Court fees are the responsibility of the Taxing Master. We understand that claims have been submitted and are with the Taxing Master for assessment and certification. A fee of £5,000, however, has issued in respect of an interim payment for a further disbursement incurred by the solicitor.

- (ii) To date, the Legal Aid paid in relation to Terence Gerry McGeough's application for judicial review to seek a Royal Prerogative of Mercy from Her Majesty the Queen in relation to these offences is £1,800 (inc VAT); this was paid as an interim payment.

Arson in the Countryside

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to increasing sentencing tariffs for arson in the countryside.

(AQW 1533/11-15)

Mr Ford: The offence of arson under Article 3 of the Criminal Damage (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment on conviction on indictment.

I consulted earlier this year on a range of potential sentencing guidelines mechanisms and am currently considering options on how best to deliver further transparency and consistency in sentencing in a manner that will promote public confidence. I intend to announce proposals on the way forward in the autumn.

Department for Regional Development

Sectarian Signage and Emblems

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to remove sectarian signage and emblems from street furniture, including lamp posts and property owned by his Department.

(AQW 1147/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service does not approve of, or support, the unauthorised use of departmental property for any purpose.

As the Member will appreciate, the removal of sectarian motivated signs and emblems is a matter that needs to be treated with sensitivity and with due regard to the safety of those who are asked to undertake the removal. The risk of escalating the problem also needs to be taken into consideration.

When Roads Service becomes aware of such signs or emblems on its property, it will assess the situation to see if action can be taken, either directly or in support of others. This often involves working with elected and local community representatives and the PSNI.

Roads Service gives priority to situations that are considered to present a road safety hazard, for example, signs or painting on the face of road signs etc.

Alleygating Schemes in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has for alleygating schemes in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1151/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I should advise that my Department's Roads Service does not have responsibility for promoting or installing alleygates in any constituency. Roads Service's role is to approve and facilitate the promotion of alleygating schemes by external providers, such as local councils, by making a Traffic Regulation Order to give legal force to the restrictions on access.

The alleygating schemes submitted by Belfast City Council that have been approved by Roads Service for the West Belfast constituency within the past year are:

- Glencairn Area;
- Glencolin/Upper Springfield Area;
- Beechmount Area; and
- Woodvale Area.

Funding for the Current A5 Road Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development when the funding for the current A5 road scheme was ring-fenced.

(AQW 1165/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The budget for the period 2011/12 to 2014/15 was announced to the Assembly by the Minister for Finance and Personnel on 4 March 2011.

DFP has advised that funding must only be used for the purposes allocated, for example the A5 and A8 Projects and, if not required for that purpose, must be surrendered.

Proposed A5 and A8 Road Schemes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development how the design standards for the proposed A5 and A8 Road Schemes were defined; and how the specification set for each section of the roads took traffic levels into consideration.

(AQW 1166/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A5 and A8 dual carriageway projects are being brought forward as part of an agreement between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the design standards used in the development of the A5 and A8 projects are defined in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

Roads Service has advised that the traffic threshold level for a dual carriageway, as indicated in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, is exceeded for all sections of the A8 and for the vast majority of the existing A5 route. It is accepted that the projected traffic volumes on the Ballygawley - Aughnacloy section of the A5 in the opening year are below the stated threshold. However, from an engineering, and in particular, road safety perspective, it is preferable to have consistency of standards along the entire length of a route.

Traffic Calming Measures Planned for North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1177/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service develops its work programmes by Council area rather than on a constituency basis.

I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of the works programme at this time.

Connecting Antrim Railway Line to the Belfast International Airport

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would conduct a feasibility study on connecting Antrim railway line to the Belfast International Airport as part of his promotion of sustainable transport.

(AQW 1210/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have no plans to carry out such a study. A previous study in 2006 concluded that any project to provide a rail service to Belfast International Airport would only become economically viable if passenger numbers using the airport were to double from existing levels. My priority at present is to maintain and improve the existing railways network within approved funding levels as agreed by the Executive.

Mobile Phones to Departmental Staff

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of providing mobile phones to departmental staff in each of the last three years, including the cost of handsets and bills.

(AQW 1213/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the years 2009/10 and 2010/11, costs incurred by my Department in respect of the provision and official use of mobile phones were as follows:

2009/10	£154,170
2010/11	£214,037

Details of expenditure in 2008/09 are unavailable.

Former Non-Executive Director of the Board of NI Water

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on legal advice in relation to the legal action taken by the former non-executive director of the Board of NI Water, Declan Gormley, since March 2011.

(AQW 1230/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department has instructed the Departmental Solicitor's Office to defend these proceedings and Counsel have been engaged. As it is normal at this stage of the proceedings, no payments have been made by the Department. The proceedings will be defended vigorously and if the Department is successful it will seek to recover its costs from the plaintiff, Mr Gormley.

Non-Executive Director of the Board of NI Water

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether legal advice was sought in relation to Declan Gormley's (a) application for the appointment of non-executive director of the Board of NI Water; and (b) appeal against his dismissal from the post; and (ii) if so, to detail this advice.

(AQW 1231/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department has, on occasion, sought legal advice from the Departmental Solicitors Office in relation to Mr Gormley's application for appointment as a non-executive director of the Board of NI Water and in relation to the legal proceedings related to his dismissal from the Board. The detail of such legal advice is subject to legal professional privilege.

Writs Issued by Declan Gormley

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the total cost incurred, to date, for the legal advice sought in relation to the writs issued by Declan Gormley against his predecessor, his Department, the former Permanent Secretary Paul Priestly and officials.

(AQW 1232/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer to the answer provided in relation to AQW 1230/11-15

Legal Actions

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of legal actions taken against his Department, or its agencies, in each of the last five years; (ii) how many were taken to court; (iii) how much in total it cost his Department; and (iv) how many of these cases were settled by (a) mediation and at what cost; and (b) compensation and at what cost.

(AQW 1233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information requested is set out in the table below. The table does not include any action taken in lands tribunals. Costs for 2010/11 are estimated at this stage.

Year	Number of Legal Actions	Number which went to court	Total Costs	Cases settled by Mediation		Cases where compensation paid	
				Number	Cost	Number	Cost
2010/11	262	6	£475,888.10	0	£0.00	2	£55,000.00
2009/10	325	31	£1,117,291.18	0	£0.00	7	£41,270.10
2008/09	337	41	£3,110,157.67	0	£0.00	18	£226,017.37
2007/08	295	46	£2,349,971.70	0	£0.00	12	£204,072.00
2006/07	478	117	£4,105,253.25	0	£0.00	34	£551,011.89

Proposed Route for the A5

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the deputy First Minister's comments in the Assembly on 21 June 2011 in relation to the proposed route for the A5.

(AQW 1297/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have noted the deputy First Minister's comments and can advise that the Public Inquiries for the A5 and A8 schemes, which the deputy First Minister's referred to, have recently concluded. I await the Inspectors' Reports, which in both cases are anticipated to be presented to the Department before the end of this year.

I intend to consider the Independent Inspector's reports and the proposed investment levels across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme.

The Member may be aware that the Irish Government recently confirmed its commitment to making a contribution to both projects. However, both Governments have agreed to look at ways of reducing costs.

Drinking Water

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) which areas are currently being advised to boil drinking water; and (ii) the reasons for this advice.

(AQW 1344/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is not currently advising any areas of Northern Ireland to boil drinking water.

However, Boil Water Notices may also be issued for private water supplies. Private water supplies in Northern Ireland are regulated by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) under The Private Water Supplies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (as amended).

Policies: Pensioners

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all the policies that have been implemented by his Department since 2007 which specifically help pensioners.

(AQW 1365/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Since 2007 my Department has put in place a range of policies which specifically help pensioners, primarily through ongoing implementation of the Accessible Transport Strategy. This Strategy sets a vision to have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.

Examples of policies which my Department has implemented include:

- The All-Ireland Free Travel Scheme for Older People, launched in April 2007, enables holders of a Translink Senior Smartpass (aged 65 and over) to travel free within the Republic of Ireland on participating public transport services.
- The Concessionary Fares Scheme which was extended in October 2008 to provide free travel on public transport to residents aged between 60 and 64, who are eligible to hold a 60+ Smartpass. Free travel for 60+ Smartpass holders was also introduced on the Strangford and Rathlin Ferry services.
- The Assisted Rural Transport Scheme is a pilot scheme due to run until the end of March 2012 and is being supported by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It allows eligible members of all the Rural Community Transport Partnerships to obtain travel at concessionary fare rates when using community transport.

Report on Northern Ireland Water

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to publish the report, due to have been published in February 2011, on Northern Ireland Water and its handling of the impact of the severe weather conditions last winter.

(AQW 1391/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Report on Northern Ireland Water's handling of the impact of the severe weather conditions last winter was published by the Utility Regulator on 3 March 2011.

Integrated Bus and Rail Centre in Lurgan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed integrated bus and rail centre in Lurgan.

(AQW 1411/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within their current Capital Plan for an integrated bus and rail station in Lurgan. There are no current plans for such an integrated station to be developed within existing budgets as agreed at Executive level.

Efficiency Savings

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development how internal efficiency savings are being achieved by his Department.

(AQW 1444/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Final Budget 2011-15 requires DRD to take forward a range of measures to deliver savings in current expenditure as follows:

2011-12	£15.5 million
2012-13	£27.1 million
2013-14	£58.1 million
2014-15	£58.4 million

These savings have been removed from the Departmental baselines. The Department has set out its plans for achieving these saving in its Savings Delivery Plans and the Department's business plans are now based on achievement of delivery plans.

DRD's Savings Delivery Plans have been published to the internet at

<http://applications.drdni.gov.uk/publications/document.asp?docid=21562>

Promoting the Use of Public Transport

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any proposals his Department has to promote and implement a move from the use of private cars towards the use of public transport.

(AQW 1445/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's current proposals to promote a move from the use of private cars towards the use of public transport are included in the existing Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012. The Strategy, and the Plans which stem from it provide for, and encourage, greater use of public transport and include proposals for improved bus and rail services, Park and Ride and Rapid Transit.

For example, within the Belfast Metropolitan area, there are now more than 40 km of bus lanes. By improving bus journey time reliability, these help to make public transport a more attractive alternative. A further 6.5 km of bus lanes are planned for the Shore Road, Crumlin Road and Shankill Road in 2011/12, subject to the successful completion of the statutory processes.

My Department's 'Belfast on the Move' proposals will introduce additional public transport priority lanes on key streets within and approaching Belfast city centre. These measures will also facilitate the future introduction of a pilot Belfast Rapid Transit network which will further enhance the public transport services in the city, linking East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter with, and through, the city centre.

In addition, my Department is using technology to help achieve a change of travel mode from the private car to public transport. The BusTrak scheme, which has been implemented on the Metro bus fleet in Belfast, provides for real time information to passengers at selected bus stops, priority for buses at traffic signals, and a fleet management system for Translink to monitor bus operations.

Roads Service has also sought to public transport services through the provision of Park & Ride sites across Northern Ireland. A strategic review of Park and Ride facilities, including the provision of quality bus corridors, is being finalised, with the aim of developing future provision which will maximise a move towards using public transport.

Roads Service also considers new or improved footways, crossing and cycling facilities, especially on schemes where they would provide a link to bus and rail services.

The Travelwise initiative run by my Department continues to promote greater use of public transport, as well as car sharing, cycling and walking, and aims to change in public attitudes away from the private car as the only main mode of travel.

Public consultation on a revised Regional Transportation Strategy closed on 28 June 2011. The new Strategy places even more emphasis on securing a shift away from the use of the private cars and focuses on moving people, and goods, rather than vehicles.

Translink

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why Translink has decided to remove the Service 64, from 1 July 2011, which is the only public transport link in Garrison, Co Fermanagh; (ii) how much the removal of this service will save; (iii) how cutting this service contributes to the key points contained within the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan; (iv) what consultation took place with local communities in relation to the removal of this service; (v) whether he will ask Translink to consider reinstating this service; and (vi) what action is being taken to ensure that public transport is available for residents of Garrison.

(AQW 1467/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that (i) the Thursday service was discontinued due to poor passenger numbers. (ii) Figures showing how much will be saved by discontinuing this service are not specifically available, as this was only part of a range of optimization measures Translink have undertaken within the Enniskillen area. (iii) The decision to discontinue this service was based upon the low patronage figures which showed that there were a total of 20 passengers over a five week period. (iv) Details of the service alterations were advertised in the Fermanagh Herald and the Impartial Reporter. A new timetable was advertised on posters and on board buses within the area. Additionally local MLAs were notified of a new timetable on 07 June 2011 (v) & (vi) Translink is now considering an alternative method of providing public transport on Thursdays for residents of Garrison. Further details on this should be available later this week and Translink have advised that they will write to you directly with the details. In the meantime the service was provided on Thursday 07 July 2011.

All-Ireland Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether he has dismantled the All-Ireland Unit within his Department; and (ii) to detail the cost of this unit in each year since it was established.

(AQW 1481/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not have a dedicated All-Ireland Unit. Staff are not assigned specifically to north/south duties but carry them out as part of a wider range of responsibilities. It is therefore not possible to provide detailed costs.

Central coordination of North South Ministerial Council and related issues are dealt with within the Department's corporate services unit.

Reservoirs at Craigtlet, North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any future plans for the reservoirs at Craigtlet, North Down.

(AQW 1504/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the six impounding reservoirs in the Craigtlet Hills area (Church Road, Creighton's Green, Ballysallagh Upper and Lower, plus Conlig Upper and Lower Reservoirs) have been formally declared no longer required for future operational use. Before declaring any of its reservoirs suitable for disposal, NIW ensures that the disposal will not have an adverse impact on current or future provision of water and wastewater services.

NIW adheres to the general principle that public bodies should limit their holdings of land and buildings to a minimum required for their present and clearly foreseen responsibilities. Disposal of the reservoirs

will be carried out in accordance with NIW's disposal strategy which requires properties to be placed on the open market in order to obtain the best price and achieve value for money.

Department for Social Development

New Housing Schemes

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what new housing schemes are (i) currently under way (ii) planned for the Lagan Valley constituency in the next four years.

(AQW 1033/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I have just approved publication of the Social Housing Development Programme for 2011/12 and it will be available on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website www.nihe.gov.uk in the coming days. Our plans for beyond that are not yet available.

In respect of our work in Lagan Valley, I can confirm that we have provisionally included 9 schemes covering 129 new homes that could start this year, subject to planning and other necessary approvals being received.

In terms of work already underway, there are 6 schemes under construction across Lagan Valley that will deliver 200 new homes when completed. The largest of these is at Ballymacoss where we will deliver 146 new homes and I look forward to visiting this site in the coming weeks.

Panel Members at Benefits Oral Appeal Tribunals

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of money paid to the panel members of appeal tribunals in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) personal attendance allowances or fees; (ii) travel; and (iii) other expenses.

(AQW 1100/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The amount of money paid to panel members of appeal tribunals in each of the last 3 years, broken down by fees and travel/other expenses, is as shown in the following table. The higher attendance fees paid in 2010-11 reflects both an increase in the numbers of sessions arranged and, in line with changes in Great Britain, an increase in sessional payments for medical members from £151 to £185.50 per session.

	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	2010-11 £
(i) Attendance fees	1,431,263	1,450,070	2,372,125
(ii) Travel & other expenses	118,934	138,231	135,953
(iii) Note 1 below.	-	-	-
Totals	1,550,197	1,588,301	2,508,078

Note 1 - The Appeals Service is unable to disaggregate overall costs for travel and other expenses

Appeal Tribunals

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development how many appeal tribunals have been cancelled due to the unavailability of documents such as doctors' notes in each of the last three years; and what was the cost of rescheduling these tribunals.

(AQW 1101/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Appeals are determined by the Appeal Tribunal which is an independent judicial body. It is for a tribunal hearing an appeal to determine whether the information available to it is sufficient

to make a decision. If a tribunal considers it appropriate, it may adjourn the hearing so that this information can be requested.

The table below outlines how many Appeal Tribunal hearings have been adjourned in the last three years because information previously requested by the tribunal, or required by the appellant, remained unavailable at hearing.

APPEALS ADJOURNED DUE TO UNAVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

No of Appeals Adjourned & Reason for Adjournment	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
GP Notes Not Available To Tribunal	1192	931	829
Hospital Notes Not Available To Tribunal	11	6	10
Appellant/Representative papers unavailable	19	30	53
	1222	967	892

The specific cost of rescheduling appeals adjourned due to unavailability of documents cannot be provided as resources are allocated across a wide range of benefit appeals and not disaggregated to show the cost of adjourned cases separately.

Appeal Tribunal Charges by GPs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to limit the charges imposed by general practitioners for the provision of a patient's medical records for the purposes of an appeal tribunal.

(AQW 1102/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service currently makes no payment for the provision of a patient's medical records. General practitioners however, can claim a fee of £10 for completion of an accompanying form that outlines the past and current complaint, any clinical findings and any ongoing treatment. If the general practitioner determines it is necessary to provide more detailed medical notes, the fee per patient rises to £17.

The Appeals Service paid £31,424 in fees for completion of these forms from April 2010 to March 2011.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to procurement by his Department (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1106/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) Since May 2007 there has been one occasion when a supplier was secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer. This contract was awarded in November 2010 to facilitate mediation/conflict resolution with groups in Strathfoyle, Londonderry due to the need for immediate resolution to community tensions which were posing a threat to the Areas at Risk process. The Areas at Risk Pilot Programme was established in 2006 to identify and intervene in areas at risk of slipping into a spiral of decline.
- (ii) The expenditure in this case was £556.80.
- (iii) McCreedy Donnelly Lowry Ltd was the supplier in this instance.
- (iv) Approval is currently being sought but has not yet been granted.

Fair Rents Officer

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 126/11-15, to outline the differences in legislative competence and practical application between a Fair Rents Officer in Great Britain and the Rent Officer for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1107/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In Great Britain, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has responsibility for the work of the rent officers whose role is:

- to determine and publish Local Housing Allowances (LHA) for every local authority for tenants in the private rented sector who make a new claim for housing benefit or have changed address on or after 7 April 2008;
- provide housing benefit determinations to local authorities for claims made prior to 7 April 2008; and
- provide fair rent registrations for private sector tenancies which commenced before 15 January 1989. Most private tenancies in Great Britain are assured or short assured tenancies and are not subject to rent control.

In Northern Ireland the rent officer is appointed under Paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and is responsible for determining an appropriate rent for a controlled tenancy (see answer to AQW 126 for details of controlled tenancies).

To determine a fair rent in Great Britain or set an appropriate rent in Northern Ireland, similar factors are taken into account including the age, character and locality of the property and any disrepair in the property.

Apart from rents controlled by the Rent Officer for Northern Ireland, the rent charged by a private landlord is a "market rent" and is a matter for the landlord and tenant.

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has responsibility for setting local housing allowance rates.

Alleygating Schemes in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any alleygating schemes planned for West Belfast.

(AQW 1143/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is not carrying out any such projects. However, funding may be awarded for alleygating where this is identified as a priority in a Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan and sufficient resources are available.

Renovation Schemes for Larne

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive renovation schemes are planned for Larne during the next financial year.

(AQW 1202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the member is referring to the current financial year, 2011/2012. The Housing Executive has advised that it has planned the following schemes for Larne in its 2011-2012 programme, subject to necessary approvals and availability of funding.

Location	Number of dwellings	Estimated Cost
Glenarm/Carnlough External Cyclical Maintenance	94	£188,000
Glenarm/Sallagh Kitchens	68	£288,000

Location	Number of dwellings	Estimated Cost
Ferris Park Heating	62	£432,000
Craigyhill Aluminium Bungalows (Specialist Scheme for structurally defective stock)	31	£1,040,000

Virtual Windows Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to support towns and villages in North Antrim with the Virtual Windows Scheme; and to outline how towns and villages can apply to participate in the Scheme.

(AQW 1206/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department recently supported a pilot Virtual Windows scheme in Perry Street in Dungannon. Although the reaction to date has been positive, we have no immediate plans to support virtual windows schemes in other towns until an evaluation of the Dungannon scheme has been completed later this year.

However, the Department will consider funding other proposals for improving the overall appearance of a row of properties which suffers from severe dereliction. These properties should be located within or near to the retail core area within all town centres or in a neighbourhood renewal area and the scheme must demonstrate that it will help deliver regeneration benefits for the wider area. Any proposal will be subject to a satisfactory appraisal and must provide good value for money. Funding will, of course, depend on the budget resources made available to the Department.

Disability Living Allowance Appeals

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have won Disability Living Allowance appeals in each (i) constituency; and (ii) council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1219/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As I advised in my recent response to AQW 521/11-15, the Appeals Service arranges Disability Living Allowance appeals to be heard in Tribunal Centres throughout Northern Ireland. Statistical data can be broken down on the basis of each Tribunal Centre but not by council area. The table below outlines the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeals allowed at hearing in each of the last three years, broken down by Tribunal Centre.

DLA APPEALS ALLOWED AT HEARING (1ST APRIL 2008 TO 31ST MARCH 2011)

Tribunal Centre	Year			Total
	08'09	09'10	10'11	
Armagh	48	34	45	127
Ballymena	79	69	87	235
Ballymoney	23	25	17	65
Banbridge	38	23	22	83
Belfast	579	592	547	1718
Coleraine	87	81	75	243
Cookstown	50	39	44	133
Craigavon	108	99	92	299
Downpatrick	65	47	49	161

Tribunal Centre	Year			Total
	08'09	09'10	10'11	
Dungannon	69	71	60	200
Enniskillen	59	52	70	181
Limavady	66	52	45	163
Londonderry	289	292	188	769
Magherafelt	55	41	52	148
Newry	101	86	85	272
Newtownards	102	127	99	328
Omagh	62	52	35	149
Strabane	62	54	39	155
Total number of allowed DLA appeals	1942	1836	1651	5429

Disability Living Allowance Claims

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development how many Disability Living Allowance claims are currently under review, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.

(AQW 1220/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available. The data for Disability Living Allowance claims currently under review is held on the Department for Work and Pensions IT System and is only available on a Northern Ireland wide basis (2,018 in the Social Security Agency and 1,611 in The Appeals Service at end of May 2011). The data cannot be broken down by Local Council area as the Department for Work and Pensions IT System is not configured to capture reviews in the same manner as it does for those in receipt of the benefit.

Strabane Social Security Office

Ms Boyle asked Minister for Social Development whether he will reject the recommendation contained in the Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review to downgrade Strabane Social Security Office to a front-line office only service, given (i) the additional pressures being placed on the local community as a result of the ongoing economic downturn; (ii) that the District remains top of the multi-deprivation league tables; and (iii) the already disproportionately low levels of public sector employment in the District.

(AQW 1242/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The service delivery model proposed under the Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review (now known as Customer First) was thoroughly tested in its North District, a wide geographic area served by seven offices. A robust evaluation followed which clearly identified service improvements to all people who lived in that area. Offices designated as front-offices under Customer First will continue to deliver the same front-line service as they do now and access to the office and the services available remains unchanged. The Social Security Agency will continue to develop and modernise its service delivery arrangements in line with the Customer First Model as it is working and delivering tangible customer service improvements. Final decisions on the range of services to be provided from the Strabane Office will be only made when Customer First is to be rolled out in West District.

Village Area of Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the decision by the Housing Executive to allow residents in the Village area of Belfast to collect and sell the bricks from the demolished houses in Lower Rockview Street for a period of one week.

(AQW 1285/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive handed over possession of this site to their demolition contractor on 9 June. The Housing Executive has never given approval for anyone to remove bricks from houses that were vacated pending demolition other than the designated contractor.

Redevelopment in the Village Area of Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether he can give an assurance that the houses listed for redevelopment in the Village area of Belfast will not be damaged by so-called 'brick bandits' ahead of their scheduled demolition.

(AQW 1286/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive continues to work closely with both the PSNI and local community leaders to stop theft and vandalism from vacant Housing Executive properties in the Village. A number of individuals are currently facing criminal charges as a result of this inter-agency approach and I would urge all members of the public to stay away from these properties and allow the Housing Executive and their contractors to carry out their work without any interruption.

Home Improvement Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any Housing Executive Home Improvement Schemes planned for the Abbey Garden area of Millisle over the next three years.

(AQW 1308/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have a kitchen scheme programmed for 2012/13 which covers the Abbey Garden area of Millisle. The entire scheme for 112 dwellings also covers Ballywalter and Donaghadee and has a provisional start date of August 2012, subject to funding being available. The Abbey Garden part of the scheme involves work to 23 properties at an estimated cost of £115,000.

Home Improvement Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any Housing Executive Home Improvement Schemes planned for the Silverstream area of Bangor over the next three years.

(AQW 1310/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not own any properties in the Silverstream area of Bangor.

Housing Executive: Kitchen Repair and Maintenance Schemes

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has allocated to kitchen repair and maintenance schemes in the Cookstown area for the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 1324/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are no kitchen replacement schemes planned for Cookstown in the 2011/12 financial year. However, the following maintenance schemes are planned for the Cookstown area in 2011/12:-

- Heating replacement (oil) – estimated cost £208,800
- External Cyclical maintenance – estimated cost £216,549
- Window Replacement – estimated cost £131,600

Kitchen Repair and Housing Maintenance Schemes: Cookstown

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development in what areas and estates in the Cookstown area does the Housing Executive intend to carry out kitchen repair and housing maintenance schemes in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 1325/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no kitchen replacement schemes planned for Cookstown in 2011/12. The Housing Executive has the following Maintenance Programmes planned for the Cookstown area in 2011/12:-

Heating Replacement (Oil):-

- Beechway 27 dwellings
- Coagh 2 2 dwellings

External Cyclical maintenance:-

- Beechway 60 dwellings
- Coagh Crescent 24 dwellings
- Coagh Street 7 7 dwellings
- Fountain Road 1 dwelling
- Greenvale Drive 38 dwellings
- Ratheen Ave. 51 dwellings
- Sullenboy Park 30 dwellings

Window Replacement:-

- Blackhill 10 dwellings
- Fountain Road 1 dwelling
- Killymoon Road 8 dwellings
- Killymoon Street 7 dwellings
- Riverside Drive 22 dwellings
- Union Place 4 dwellings
- Union Street 3 dwellings

Newbuild Housing Projects for East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive's new build housing projects which are planned for East Belfast in (i) 2011; (ii) 2012; (iii) 2013; and (iv) 2014.

(AQW 1342/11-15)

Mr McCausland: We have identified 11 schemes which could deliver up to 123 units for the East Belfast area this year. Details of these will be found on this year's Social Housing Development Programme which will be published on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website within the coming days.

I am currently considering the programme for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 year and will advise the member once that information is available.

Housing Waiting List: East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in East Belfast were on the housing waiting list in (i) 2009; (ii) 2010; and (iii) 2011.

(AQW 1346/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the numbers of people on the housing waiting list in East Belfast in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

Year	Number of Applicants
2009	1,962
2010	1,837
2011	2,125

East Belfast: Homeless

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in East Belfast were registered as homeless in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1347/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of applicants registered on the Waiting List as homeless (Full Duty Applicant status) in East Belfast for each of the last three years.

Year	Applicants registered as homeless
2008/2009	377
2009/2010	386
2010/2011	367

Home Improvement Schemes for the Churchill Area of Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any Housing Executive Home Improvement Schemes planned for the Churchill area of Bangor over the next three years.

(AQW 1371/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has a reserve scheme in its programme in 2011/12 for the replacement of kitchens in the Churchill and Redburn areas in North Down. Of the 97 properties included in the scheme, 24 are in the Churchill area. However, a survey of the dwellings has yet to be carried out by the Housing Executive and kitchens will only be replaced if they are in poor condition and warrant replacement. The cost of replacing the kitchens is estimated at £456,000 and the scheme will only proceed if funding is available.

Management and Governance of the Housing Executive

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development when the independent audit, by ASM Howarth of the management and governance of the Housing Executive, will be made public.

(AQW 1403/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the current legal stance adopted for withholding disclosure of the ASM Howarth report, who were commissioned to undertake an independent review of Red Sky, is broadly on grounds of confidentiality, commercial sensitivity and legal privilege. Bearing in mind the contentious nature of this matter and the potential for litigation by the administrators, the position continues to be that it is inappropriate to release the full report given the requirements of due process and the constraints imposed by its confidential nature.

Green New Deal

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the progress made within his Department on the Green New Deal.

(AQW 1427/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development Permanent Secretary, Will Haire, is leading a cross Departmental group to examine the potential of the Green New Deal for Northern Ireland. The group is working with the Green New Deal consortium to help them formalise a business plan which can inform any economic appraisal developed by the Department on the best approach to allocating the £12 million the Executive identified in support of the concept.

Green New Deal

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the extent and the level of co-operation by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the delivery of a Green New Deal.

(AQW 1430/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development Permanent Secretary, Will Haire, is leading a cross Departmental group to examine the potential of the Green New Deal for Northern Ireland. Senior officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are playing a full role in the cross Departmental group. I met with Arlene Foster, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on 7 June to review progress with the Green New Deal.

Kitchen Replacement Scheme in Banbridge

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development when the Kitchen Replacement Scheme in Banbridge will begin, particularly in the Lochard Park area.

(AQW 1460/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that a kitchen improvement scheme involving properties in Lochard Park is currently programmed to commence in late 2011, subject to the availability of funding and a successful tendering procedure. Actual timing for commencement of work in Lochard Park will be subject to agreeing a programme with the successful contractor.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Live Streaming of Committee Meetings

Mr A Maginness asked the Assembly Commission whether an assurance can be given that live-streaming of committee meetings on the website will continue.

(AQO 237/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly has two video streaming channels accessible via the Assembly website. They are used to stream video from Plenary each Monday and Tuesday, and Committee meetings from the Senate Chamber and one other televised room during the rest of the week. There are no plans to change this service.

Electronic ID Pass System

Mr Craig asked the Assembly Commission how much it cost to install the new electronic ID pass system.

(AQW 1379/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The new ID pass system which went operational on Thursday 23rd June 2011, is an additional component of the Assembly's new Security Management System (SMS) currently being installed and commissioned within Parliament Buildings.

The new ID pass system was provided by CORE Systems NI, a software development company based in Belfast, who are one of the contractors currently involved in the installation of the new SMS system.

The ID pass system cost £29,149.17 to install and commission, with annual maintenance costs of £2649.20. These costs are exclusive of VAT. These costs are incorporated within the fully budgeted SMS project.

The system is also being further developed to incorporate a new style Visitor and Contractor photographic ID pass which will be introduced in late July at no further cost.

Engaging With Young People

Mr P Maskey asked the Assembly Commission to outline its strategy for engaging with young people. **(AQO 235/11-15)**

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A strategic priority for the Assembly Commission is to increase public engagement with the Assembly. Engagement is the process of giving the public a voice and enabling them to contribute to the democratic process.

Young people are at the heart of the Commission's work in this area. The Assembly's Education Service is an effective means by which young people can become engaged in the democratic process.

The Education Service aims to:

- Inform young people about the role and the work of the Assembly;
- Engage young people to understand the relevance of the Assembly; and
- Empower young people to get involved by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to take part.

This year, almost 20,000 young people took part in Education Service programmes, and the number of participants is increasing each year.

The internet has been identified as an opportunity to engage with young people and a strategy of developing online, media rich, interactive activities has been adopted. The Assembly's Education Service will launch its new website in the new academic year. The Education Service has two dedicated teaching areas within Parliament Buildings, which have recently been equipped with interactive whiteboards and remote voting systems in order to promote engagement and learning.

However learning about the work of the Assembly is not dependent on a visit to Parliament Buildings. The 'Outreach to Schools' programme was launched in September 2010. To date, almost 2000 pupils from 30 schools have availed of the outreach programme. Many MLAs have positively contributed to the levels of engagement by attending schools with Education Officers.

In the last year, a number of schools have engaged with Assembly Committees and individual MLAs via video conference, for example, post primary schools from Magherafelt questioned Mid Ulster MLAs about local issues. The Education Service also offers teachers' seminars which aim to explain the work of the Assembly, focussing on links with the curriculum.

The Commission is also supporting the establishment of a youth forum. Between March 2010 and April 2010, a Youth Panel undertook a number of activities, including research and study visits. The Panel's proposals were presented to the Assembly Commission on 22 March 2011. The Commission approved, in principle, the establishment of a Youth Assembly and a public consultation is currently in progress.

Managing Information

Mr Hussey asked the Assembly Commission to outline how it manages information in a way that makes it easily accessible to retrieve and interpret.

(AQO 243/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Information Management System (AIMS) is a central database of procedural information which includes:

- All current and previous MLAs and their roles within the Assembly;
- MLA contact information;
- Details from the Register of Members' Interests;
- Details of all plenary business items;
- Details of Assembly questions and answers.

The information is fully searchable on the AIMS portal on the intranet (AsslSt) and can produce reports on Committee, Party and Member activity, as well as statistics regarding Assembly Questions. Reports are user friendly and graphical based.

A new development phase of the AIMS system will focus on integration of the Official Report (Hansard). It is planned to include the text from all debates in plenary and committee sessions as a searchable resource on AsslSt. This phase is due for completion in Autumn 2011.

The new Assembly website is due to be launched later in 2011. In the first phase, elements of AIMS will be integrated with the new website along with an enhanced search function.

An Information Management Strategy has also been developed to provide a clear framework for the management of information within the Assembly Secretariat over the next five years, highlighting short, medium and long-term priorities.

The Assembly Commission currently uses paper as a means to record corporate information. All records are held on files, registered and managed by a file management system. Electronic systems are used to manage specific issues such as Payroll, HR and Finance. There is also an online publication search facility which is accessible within the Research and Information Service.

In order to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, public sector organisations are required to have an approved publication scheme, which is a means of providing access to information which an authority proactively publishes. The Assembly Commission approved publication scheme is available on the website.

The Assembly Commission has a commitment to make information available in a range of alternative formats including large print, Braille, audio cassette and compact disc. Information leaflets about the Assembly are available in hardcopy and on the website in ten alternative languages.

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

Mr B McCrea asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
(AQO 247/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A strategic priority for the Assembly Commission is to increase public engagement with the Assembly. The Commission has identified engagement with young people as a priority and committed the Assembly to consider the establishment of a Youth Assembly.

The Assembly's Education Service was given the task of taking this project forward. Following initial consultations with young people and other stakeholders, it was decided that this should be a youth-led project. Therefore, in early 2010, a Youth Panel was established to develop a policy proposal for a Youth Assembly, to be presented to the Assembly Commission for consideration in March 2011.

Comprising 30 16-18 year olds, the Youth Panel's specific terms of reference were to agree the:

- Purpose of the Youth Assembly;
- A suitable structure for the Youth Assembly; and
- A suitable means of determining the membership of the Youth Assembly - taking into account age range, method of selection and how to ensure fair representation.

Between March 2010 and March 2011, the Youth Panel undertook a range of activities. They held meetings with stakeholders, including youth organisations and political parties; went on research visits to other participatory youth bodies; created an online survey about the Youth Assembly; and held regional meetings with young people throughout the north of Ireland.

On 15 March 2010, the Youth Panel presented a draft plan to the Education Minister, Caitríona Ruane, and the Junior Ministers, Gerry Kelly and Robin Newton, who were supportive of the plan to set up a Youth Assembly. The proposals were then presented to the Assembly Commission on 22 March 2011 which approved, in principle, the establishment of the Youth Assembly and a public consultation on the Youth Panel's proposals.

The proposals were launched on 19 April 2011 and the public consultation began on 16 May 2011. It will continue until 5.00 pm on 15 September 2011. The Commission will then publish a summary of responses following the completion of the public consultation, indicating how they have impacted on the development of final proposals for the Youth Assembly. Recruitment for the Youth Assembly will then commence. It is hoped that the Youth Assembly will be established by the end of 2011 or early 2012.

The proposals and information about the public consultation can be found on the Youth Panel page of the Assembly's website.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 29 July 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Support Fund

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the groups that were successful in obtaining funding in the 18-month application window under the Strategic Support Fund; (ii) the amount of funding each group has been allocated; and (iii) for their assessment of whether there is an imbalance in favour of groups from a nationalist background.

(AQW 95/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and the deputy First Minister): The table below shows the groups that were successful in obtaining funding for an 18-month programme of activities under the Strategic Support Fund. It also shows how the funding has been allocated to each group over the 18-month period.

Group	1 October 2010 to 31 March 2011 Award (£)	1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 allocation (£)
Ashton Community Trust	235,809.00	438,169.20
Cunámh	65,194.00	176,558.00
WAVE Trauma Centre	608,423.00	1,168,951.50
Relatives for Justice	321,217.35	510,651.16
Lenadoon Counselling	55,111.54	69,975.07
Colin Community Counselling	37,900.14	72,272.71
Pat Finucane Centre	6,399.00	12,759.00
Corpus Christi Counselling Centre	62,244.69	160,188.12
Centre for Creative Energy (now Aurora)	38,598.00	79,616.00
New Life Counselling	85,758.19	165,690.42
Tara Centre	93,971.60	102,227.20
Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)	79,019.04	131,378.88
Koram Centre	125,071.61	141,336.23
Holy Trinity Centre	19,030.89	27,915.14
Firinne	73,049.34	118,587.65
Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation (NICTT)	199,771.00	334,878.00

Groups had the opportunity to apply for either an 18 or 12-month programme of funding. Below is a table illustrating the groups and allocations for the 12-month period:

Group	1 April 2011- 31 March 2012
Aisling Centre	£ 60,208.27
South East Fermanagh Foundation	£160,202.48
Ely Centre	£200,687.62
Omagh Support & Self Help Group	£104,952.94
Families Moving On	£114,196.00
Calms	£139,743.08
Columba Community	£ 68,959.00
Derry Well Women	£ 82,723.22
West Tyrone Voice	£110,361.00
Peace Factory	£ 90,171.19
NOVA	£118,367.00
RAFT	£109,285.62
REACT	£ 40,390.50
HURT	£110,100.00
NI Association for Mental Health	£ 74,001.00
Springhill Community House	£ 80,847.22
Combat Stress Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society	£ 81,642.00
Contact Youth	£ 45,884.48
Families Beyond Conflict	£ 52,249.81
Haven	£ 66,068.00
Antrim Counselling Centre	£ 30,841.00
NI Music Therapy Trust	£ 78,925.88
Survivors of Trauma	£143,454.40
HELP NI	£ 56,457.73
Wider Circle	£ 90,904.21
MAST	£ 68,764.00
South Down Action for Healing Wounds	£ 84,157.46
Regimental Association of UDR - Coleraine Branch	£ 53,603.83

All applications to the Strategic Support Fund had to satisfy specified criteria and were assessed by the Community Relations Council. No formal assessment of the groups' perceived background was conducted.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how funding under the Social Investment Fund will be delivered to local communities; and when the allocation of this funding will begin.

(AQW 139/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials are currently engaged in discussions both with officials from other government departments and key stakeholders to develop a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund.

We hope to issue this paper for a period of public consultation in the next few weeks. Following an analysis of responses to the public consultation, we would hope to see funding being allocated during the autumn.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC: Gratuity Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the issue of tax and National Insurance arose when the agreement was reached with HM Government to pay £20 million for a fund to establish a gratuity scheme for the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC. [R]

(AQW 273/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £20m gratuity scheme for Part Time members of the RUC and the PSNI Reserve was not part of the formal agreement with the NI Executive, but was negotiated separately by the leader of the DUP.

Public Correspondence

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 112/11-15, (i) whether they will waive their privilege so that the legal advice, which was sought from the Attorney General on the role of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in dealing with public correspondence, invitations and meetings, can be published; (ii) why they sought this advice; (iii) whether any changes were subsequently made to the way correspondence was handled; and (iv) whether all correspondence to either Minister is seen by both and replies signed off by both or can either Minister in their official capacity accept an invitation, attend an event or meet with a third party without the knowledge or consent of the other.

(AQW 510/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Privilege on the advice and why it was sought is not waived. Correspondence is dealt with on a case by case basis.

Celebration of the Centenary of Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their vision for the celebration of the centenary of Northern Ireland; and what plans are being made to mark the occasion.

(AQW 767/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No plans have yet been made to mark this occasion.

Joint Ministerial Committee Meeting

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the issues which were discussed at the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting in Downing Street on 8 June 2011.

(AQW 837/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The issues which were discussed at the Joint Ministerial Committee plenary session on 8 June are set out in the formal Communiqué issued after the meeting. The Communiqué is as below:

Joint Ministerial Committee – 8 June 2011 - Communiqué

A Plenary session of the Joint Ministerial Committee was held in 10 Downing Street today under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, Rt Hon David Cameron MP. The participants were the following:

- 1 from HM Government, the Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon Michael Moore MP, the Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Cheryl Gillan MP, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Rt Hon Danny Alexander; from the Scottish Government the First Minister, Rt Hon Alex Salmond MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney MSP, and the Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business, Bruce Crawford MSP; from the Northern Ireland Executive, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA; and from the Welsh Government the First Minister, Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM.
- 2 This was the first meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee since the formation of the new administrations after the elections to the devolved legislatures on 5 May.
- 3 The two principal agenda items were, firstly, the priorities of the new administrations and working together successfully across the four administrations; and, secondly, the state of the economy and the public finances.
- 4 On the first item, Ministers discussed their respective priorities, particularly those of the three recently elected administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In taking forward these priorities, Ministers agreed that the principles established in the Memorandum of Understanding between the four administrations in 1999 continue to provide an essential foundation for sound inter-administration relations. They also reaffirmed their commitment to work together on the basis of good communication, close co-operation and mutual respect, as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.
- 5 On the second item, Ministers discussed the current economic climate. They agreed on the importance of working together closely on issues of mutual interest in order to achieve their objectives of securing the recovery and sustaining economic growth. They agreed that it would be important to maintain regular and positive dialogue on these issues, including at a meeting of the Finance Ministers' Quadrilateral due to take place on 14 July.
- 6 The meeting agreed amendments to the Memorandum of Understanding providing for additions to the dispute-avoidance and resolution protocol. The amendments would allow the Joint Ministerial Committee to commission from an agreed, independent third party analysis of issues relating to unresolved disagreements and disputes. The meeting further discussed progress made so far towards the resolution of outstanding disputes. On the issue of the Olympics funding dispute, the meeting agreed to consider the matter further to examine ways in which progress can be made.
- 7 The meeting also agreed the attached Annual Report, summarising the activities of the Joint Ministerial Committee since the last meeting of the Plenary in June 2010. This will be published on each administration's website.

Sectarian and Racial Activity

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what indicators they use to measure the scale of sectarian and racial activity; and what have these results shown over the last five years.
(AQW 921/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In January 2007, OFMDFM published the 'Good Relations Indicators Baseline Report'. Four further updates have subsequently been published, the latest in January 2011.

The indicators monitor good relations over time and included within these are a number specific to sectarian and racial activity. These are as follows:

RACIALLY MOTIVATED HATE INCIDENTS AND CRIMES

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Incidents	1,047	976	990	1,038	842
Crimes	861	757	771	712	531

Whilst there has been some fluctuation over the past five years, racially motivated hate incidents are down by a fifth from 1,047 incidents in 2006/07 to 842 in 2010/11.

Crimes with a racist motivation fell by a quarter between 2009/10 and 2010/11 (712 versus 531). Generally speaking, over the past five years there has been a downward trend in this type of crime. In fact, the 2010/11 figure is the lowest since 2004/05 when they were first presented in the Good Relations baseline report.

SECTARIAN MOTIVATED HATE INCIDENTS AND CRIMES

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Incidents	1,695	1,584	1,595	1,840	1,437
Crimes	1,217	1,056	1,017	1,264	995

Despite there being a peak in the number of sectarian incidents in 2009/10 with 1,840 incidents recorded by the PSNI, the overall trend has been one of a slow reduction. In the past five years there has been a reduction of 15% in sectarian motivated incidents and at 1,437 the 2010/11 figure is the lowest since the series began in 2005/06.

Similarly, there has been a downward trend in sectarian motivated crimes and whilst the 2009/10 figure did see an increase, the latest figure of 995 indicates a further reduction in this crime type. Compared with 5 years ago there has been a decrease of 222 sectarian crimes (18%). The number of sectarian crimes has fallen below 1,000 for the first time since the data series began in 2005/06

Note: not all incidents will result in the recording of a crime whilst other incidents might constitute more than one crime.

ATTACKS ON SYMBOLIC PREMISES

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Church or chapel	19	37	24	23
GAA or Ancient Order of Hibernians Hall	6	10	15	8
Orange or Apprentice Boys Hall	63	61	72	58
School	6	13	15	*

* Cell suppression has been applied to ensure that the identity of individuals/organisations or any private information relating to them is not revealed

This indicator covers sectarian attacks on churches or chapels; GAA or Ancient Order of Hibernians Halls; Orange or Apprentice Boys Halls; and schools. The figures are a subset of sectarian motivated crimes and date back to 2007/08. Over the four year period of 2007/08 to 2010/11 attacks have tended to fluctuate, with no clear pattern being identified for any of the four categories of symbolic premises. However, it is worth noting that for each category the 2010/11 figures are lower than those recorded in the previous year. Over the four years, at least half of all sectarian attacks on symbolic premises have been targeted at Orange Halls or Apprentice Boys' Halls.

Note: changes were introduced in 2007/08 to improve the accuracy and reliability of these figures and consequently data collected prior to this may not be directly comparable.

Motivation behind intimidation of those presenting as homeless

Homeless due to:	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Racial intimidation	41	32	45	96
Sectarian intimidation	67	53	61	75

Since 2006/07, NIHE have collected information on the motivation behind the intimidation of those presenting as homeless, recording reasons including sectarianism and racism. There has been some increase in the number of households presenting as homeless both as a result of sectarian and racial intimidation, the increase being more dramatic for those attributing their homelessness status to the latter and likely to be linked to the attacks on Roma families in June 2009. Collectively, there has been an increase of 63 such cases since recording began. The 2009/10 figures of 96 for those citing racial intimidation as the reason for their state of homelessness represents a rise for two consecutive years; the same trend is apparent for those citing sectarian intimidation with 75 such cases recorded in 2009/10.

A number of other related indicators, whilst less specific to the question asked, can be found at the following link:

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/equalityresearch/research-publications/gr-pubs.htm>

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has spent on Special Advisers since May 2007, broken down by (i) salary; (ii) pension contributions; (iii) expenses; (iv) office costs; and (v) other costs.

(AQW 965/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The following table sets out annual rates of pay to Special Advisers within the Office of the First and deputy First Minister in pay bands for the period May 2007 to March 2011 inclusive.

Financial Year	Pay Band		Number of Special Advisers within Band
	From:	To:	
2007-08	£35,120	£48,824	3
	£56,140	£78,540	5
	£81,600	£160,000	1
2008-09	£57,300	£79,740	8
2009-10	£57,300	£82,531	8
2010-11	£57,300	£82,531	8

Special Adviser appointments are pensionable under the Northern Ireland Civil Service pension arrangements. Full details on NICS pensions can be accessed on the NICS pensions website <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni>.

To give detailed information on pension contributions paid would risk a disclosure under the Data Protection Act as the scheme/arrangement the member is in is personal information. For Premium/ Nuvos members the employer's contributions range between 18-25% depending on salary band (see Table 1 below) and for Partnership members the contributions range between 3-12.5% with a matching employer contribution of up to 3% and 0.8% payable to the PCSPS(NI) for risk benefits (see Table 2 below).

TABLE 1: ASLC RATES PAYABLE IN EPN 03/11 (EMPLOYER'S CONTRIBUTIONS)

Salary Band	Annual Full Time Equivalent Pensionable Salary 2010/11	Employers' ASLC charge
	£ pa	% of salary
1	up to 23,099	18
2	23,100 to 46,899	20
3	46,900 to 100,999	23.5
4	101,000 and over	25

The Partnership pension account booklet is on the CSP website - link:

http://www.dfpi.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni/partnership_pension_account_____sep_2008_layout_1.pdf

TABLE 2: PARTNERSHIP SCHEME EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION RATES

Age at last 6 April	% Rate contribution - Percentage of pensionable earnings
Under 21	3
21 to 25	4.5
26 to 30	6.5
31 to 35	8
36 to 40	10
41 to 45	11.5
46 or over	12.5

There were no incremental office costs as a result of Special Advisers using existing NICS DFP provided accommodation.

Travel and subsistence costs amounted to £0.171m over the period from May 2007 to March 2011, while other costs amounted to £0.045m in the same period.

Corporation Tax

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had, or intend to have, with the Office for Budget Responsibility regarding the rate of Corporation Tax and the implications for the block grant.

(AQW 1067/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not had direct discussions with the Office for Budget Responsibility. However, we have access to its input to the Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy consultation exercise, as HM Treasury sought detailed tax advice from the Office for Budget Responsibility when drawing up its consultation paper.

Victims' Groups

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the victims' groups which have received funding from their Department; and (ii) the amount of funding each group received, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1170/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding to victims' groups is delivered through the Department's intermediary funding provider the Community Relations Council. The funding received by each group until 2009/10 can be obtained from the Community Relations Council's published annual reports for the relevant years. These are available on the CRC website <http://www.community-relations.org.uk>. Figures for 2010/11 are not yet available but will be published on the CRC website when finalised.

The Department also directly funded a number of victims' groups in the last five years, most notably through the Interim Capacity Fund. The funding which has been directly administered by the Department is set out in the table below. This support was to provide continuity and capacity between Peace II and Peace III.

FUNDING TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS GROUPS DIRECTLY ADMINISTERED BY OFMDFM

Financial Year	Organisation	Amount £
2006/07	New Life Counselling	8,854.12
2007/08	New Life Counselling	71,330.00
2008/09	Journey Towards Healing	12,618.00
2008/09 (Interim Capacity Fund)	Trauma Recovery Network	38,774.40
	The Ely Centre	34,367.00
	Survivors of Trauma	25,555.00
	Saver/Naver	32,080.00
	Relatives for Justice	53,130.00
	Ashton Centre	16,239.00
	Holy Trinity Centre	10,888.00
	Best Cellars Music Collective	21,532.00
	Cunamh	23,283.00
	C.A.L.M.S	38,276.64
	Falls Women's Centre	26,992.00
	RAFT	45,600.25
	Conflict Trauma Resource Centre	70,769.20
	Trademark	22,007.00
	ICPD	10,322.00
	The Tara Centre	19,676.90
	FAIR (for 2 separate projects)	72,605.00
Peace Factory Project	40,991.77	
WAVE	351,595.00	
2009/10	Journey Towards Healing	100,942.00

Financial Year	Organisation	Amount £
2009/10 (Interim Capacity Fund)	West Tyrone Voice	34,273.50
	FAIR (for 2 separate projects)	72,605.00
	WAVE	428,611.00
	Peace Factory Project	40,991.77
2010/11	Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation	199,772.00
	Journey Towards Healing	121,409.00
2010/11 (Interim Capacity Fund)	WAVE	154,625.00

Senior Civil Servants: Protocols When Responding to Queries Received from MLAs

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the protocols that apply to Senior Civil Servants when responding to queries received from MLAs by (i) letter; (ii) email; and (iii) phone.
(AQW 1287/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would anticipate that communication in any format from an MLA would normally be made directly to us or to our Private Offices for consideration and response. Any query raised directly by an MLA with an OFMDFM official should therefore be transferred by the official to our Private Office for handling in accordance with arrangements for Ministerial correspondence.

We would also refer you to our previous response to AQW 268/11 in relation to correspondence with the Head of the Civil Service.

Policies: Pensioners

Mr Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all the policies that have been implemented by their Department since 2007 which specifically help pensioners.
(AQW 1291/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have implemented or are developing a number of policies specifically aimed at helping older people.

These include establishing and supporting the Older People's Advocate, developing the legislation necessary to establish and recruit a Commissioner for Older People and development of a new overarching older people's strategy to replace "Ageing in an Inclusive Society".

Work to recruit an Older People's Commissioner is now nearing completion and we hope to make an announcement on the appointment over the summer period. The development of a new older people's strategy is also at an advanced stage and we anticipate launching the strategy for consultation in the autumn.

Given the cross cutting nature of the new strategy, OFMDFM will work with Departments to develop robust and effective Action Plans which will deliver the aims and objectives of the strategy. While OFMDFM will have an important role to play co-ordinating input from Departments, the content and delivery of the Action Plans will be a matter for individual Departments.

Draft Child Poverty Strategy

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the consultation on the draft Child Poverty Strategy.

(AQO 186/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The period of formal consultation in respect of our Child Poverty Strategy proposals ended on 6 February 2011.

Following an analysis of the 49 formal consultation responses received and the subsequent Executive approval on 22 March 2011, the Child Poverty Strategy was published on 24 March 2011. The Strategy sets out the actions proposed by the Executive to address the issue of Child Poverty.

We are developing a delivery plan and monitoring framework which will detail key initiatives and signature projects to progress the strategic priorities and priority action areas identified in the strategy.

It is intended that a first draft of this plan and monitoring framework will be provided to the Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum for their consideration and input. The plan and monitoring framework will allow us to measure progress towards eradicating child poverty here.

Big Society Monies

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office regarding the allocation of “big society” monies to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1349/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: While we have had no direct discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the allocation of Big Society monies, the First Minister met recently with the Rt Hon Hugo Swire MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, to discuss the wider Big Society agenda.

Minister Swire also met separately with a number of Executive Ministers on the issue, in addition to hosting a seminar on 27 June for Ministers and representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

Peace Funding

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the discussions that they have had with the European Commission regarding the extension of Peace Funding.

(AQW 1392/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current PEACE III Programme will run until 2013. We began to investigate the possibility of a successor programme in 2010 and formally raised the possibility of a PEACE IV Programme with President Barroso when we met with him last December in Brussels.

The President acknowledged that EU peace funding had made a significant and positive impact in terms of supporting the wider peace process. He was not, however, in a position to confirm the likelihood of a further PEACE Programme as this was, and still remains, subject to the outcome of detailed negotiations on future European cohesion policy and the next multi-annual budget framework for Europe.

The European Parliament’s Regional Policy Committee, chaired by Danuta Hübner, was supportive when it recently considered further PEACE and IFI funding for the region. We raised the matter of a PEACE IV Programme during our meeting with EU Regional Policy Commissioner, Johannes Hahn, when he joined with us to open the Peace Bridge on 25 June.

Commissioner Hahn was very favourably disposed, indicating that he would support Peace monies being made available in the future, but he stressed the need for the United Kingdom and Irish Governments to formally request this so that continued cross-border Peace funding could be factored into upcoming EU budget negotiations.

In response to a call from Junior Ministers Bell and Anderson for UK government support for further peace funding at the 13 June meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (Europe), HM Treasury agreed in principle to a successor for the Peace III Programme.

We understand that the Irish government is actively considering this issue in the context of its approach to overall negotiations on the European Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

It is hoped that both the United Kingdom and Irish Governments will be in a position to make a formal proposal to the European Commission in the near future.

Legal Advice

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much was spent on legal advice from (i) the departmental solicitor; and (ii) external solicitors in reaching the decision not to release any information on the disciplinary process for the former Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 1393/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Legal advice was not sought in reaching the decision not to release any further documentation on the former Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development disciplinary process. Maintaining the confidentiality of the documentation associated with disciplinary processes is a requirement on Departments arising from paragraph 12.1 of Section 6.03 of the NICS HR Handbook. This can be accessed on the DFP website via the following link: <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/publication-scheme-hr-policies>. We understand from the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service that in accordance with the normal employment policies of the NICS, it is not intended to release any further documentation about what is an internal disciplinary matter which has been managed in accordance with NICS HR policies.

Social Investment and Protection Funds

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of recent press reports highlighting the lack of success in relation to job creation in West Belfast and other deprived areas, for an assessment of how the Social Investment and Protection Funds will deal with the legacies of long-term unemployment.

(AQO 188/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive announced the creation of the Social Investment Fund and the Social Protection Fund in the draft budget for 2011-2015. The deployment of these Funds will address deprivation and poverty in a strategic way where the impact can be seen and felt by everyone in the community.

Historically, projects have been developed to meet the criteria of a particular funding stream and this funding is often strictly aligned to a single department's policy. The Social Investment Fund will develop a more integrated approach to enhance economic growth, employability and the sustainability of communities.

The Fund will help areas of economic disadvantage by redressing the imbalance in our society by building pathways to employment, ending dereliction, increasing community services and tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation. The funds will link education, job provision and infrastructural investment in areas. Its strength will be in binding together existing schemes and having the capacity to fill gaps and enhance services where necessary.

Funding will be based on agreed strategic plans which are developed by communities themselves. The communities will be facilitated in developing strategies where necessary and intervention will focus on the joint support of community-based expertise and the strategic and financial input of government.

OFMDFM officials are developing a consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund.

British-Irish Council and North/South Ministerial Council

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the anticipated cost of the British Irish Council for 2011/12; and the annual cost of the secretariat of the North South Ministerial Council in the last two available years.

(AQW 1417/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Secretariat for the British-Irish Council (BIC) is currently provided jointly by the British and Irish Governments. No direct funding is given by the Northern Ireland Executive to the Council, although support is provided through the co-ordination function which OFMDFM staff exercises across all Northern Ireland Departments in respect of BIC activities, and through the participation of officials from other departments in its work streams.

The Northern Ireland Executive, together with the seven other member administrations, has agreed to fund a standing Secretariat which will be based in Edinburgh. The indicative running costs of the Secretariat are £170,000 per annum of which Northern Ireland's share will be £15,300. This figure does not however include accommodation costs which will also be shared but which have yet to be determined pending further decisions to be taken by the Council.

In addition, the cost of BIC meetings will continue to be met by each host administration and it has also been agreed that member administrations, where possible, will each contribute staff on a rotating secondment basis, with each bearing the related salary costs for their own staff.

It is not possible at this time to provide information on the Executive's actual total financial contribution in the 2011/12 financial year as this will depend on the achievement of the target commencement date for the Secretariat of 1 January 2012.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Joint Secretariat is jointly funded by the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government. The cost of running the NSMC Joint Secretariat is published each year in the NSMC Annual Report. The annual cost for each of the last two available calendar years is:

2009 - £1,686,380, of which the NI Executive's contribution was £685,233

2010 - £2,509,457, of which the NI Executive's contribution was £1,142,223

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) the current operations and functions of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and how its programme of work is being achieved; and (ii) their intentions for the future of the SIB.

(AQW 1438/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) The functions of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) are:
- to advise Ministers on the Investment Strategy (ISNI);
 - to support Departments and public bodies in the development, procurement and delivery of strategic infrastructure projects;
 - to support the effective management of public sector assets.

SIB has provided advice on the updating of the Investment Strategy which is currently under consideration.

SIB is currently directly managing, on behalf of departments, 11 major programmes and projects with a total estimated value of £1.6bn. This work includes the provision of Project Directors for the:

- Desertcreat Training College;
- Lisanelly Educational Campus;

- Downshire Site Redevelopment;
- Belfast Rapid Transit Programme;
- Titanic Signature Project;
- North West Regional Waste Management Procurement;
- Arc21 Waste management procurement; and
- The Maze Long Kesh (MLK) programme delivery unit (PDU).

SIB is also providing advice and other support to some 30 other programmes and projects that have a total estimated value of £2.7bn.

The central Asset Management Unit (AMU) is in the process of being established within SIB. The Executive agreed Budget 2010 set the AMU the task of realising £100m in capital receipts through the disposal of surplus assets within the next four years.

A full description of SIB's current operations and functions can be found in its corporate and business plans which are published on the organisation's website, (www.sibni.org).

- (ii) There are currently no plans to change the role and functions of SIB. However, any decisions on its future will be informed by the findings of the Executive's ongoing review of all Arms Length Bodies

Social Investment Fund

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process for determining the criteria used to select the areas entitled to apply to the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 1455/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Programmes will be targeted at those communities most in need. The Executive agreed a strategic paper on the Social Investment Fund which is available on the OFMDFM website at:

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/strategic-paper-on-the-social-investment-fund.pdf.

This outlines some proposed governance and administrative arrangements including criteria for funding and criteria for determining the localities to which funding will be allocated.

We are aiming to issue a more detailed paper for consultation over the summer. This will help inform the process.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the outcome of discussions they have had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to making the Social Investment Fund accessible to deprived rural communities.

(AQW 1456/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have had no direct discussions with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the Social Investment Fund. An outline strategic Social Investment Fund paper was discussed and agreed at an Executive meeting attended by the then Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development. The document is available on the OFMDFM website at:

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/strategic-paper-on-the-social-investment-fund.pdf.

Officials have been liaising with a range of stakeholders and all relevant departments as the policy develops.

Funding for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Groups

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 291/11-15, (i) to detail what contact their Department has had with representatives from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) sector regarding the ending of the funding package which had been agreed by the then Secretary of State and administered by their Department and the outcome of any discussions; and (ii) whether any of their Department's arm's-length bodies have provided funding to LGBT groups since the initial funding ended; and (iii) if so, which groups received funding and how much funding they received. **(AQW 1479/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department has contact with representatives of the LGBT sector as it does with all Section 75 sectors and maintained contact specifically with regard to the administration of the pre-devolution funding package.

OFMDFM Arms Length Bodies have stated that they have not provided any funding to any lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) group.

Parades Commission: Meeting

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent meeting with the Parades Commission.

(AQW 1487/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Parades Commission on 28 June 2011. At the meeting we discussed the upcoming marching season and our hopes for a calm summer. We reiterated our commitment to a new and improved framework for dealing with parades, as outlined in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when the public consultation on the Social Investment Fund will begin; (ii) how long the consultation process will last; (iii) on which Social Investment Fund document the public will be consulted and how they are to respond; (iv) how the financial year 2010/11 year 1 Social Investment Fund budgetary allocation of £8m has been spent; (v) how the Ministerial Committee to manage the Social Investment Fund will be appointed; (vi) which Departments will be represented on the Ministerial Committee; (vii) how the Ministerial Committee will operate and make decisions; and (ix) how and by whom the Social Investment Fund Investment Zone Steering Groups will be appointed.

(AQW 1510/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) The Executive agreed a strategic paper on the Social Investment Fund which is available on the OFMDFM website at:
www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/strategic-paper-on-the-social-investment-fund.pdf. A consultation paper on the Social Investment Fund will issue in the coming weeks.
- (ii) Although a final decision has still to be taken we would hope to consult on our proposals for a period in line with current Executive guidelines i.e. up to 12 weeks.
- (iii) A specific consultation document is being developed. During the consultation period it is intended to hold a number of associated consultation workshops, at which members of the public will be given the opportunity to reply, in person, to our proposals. The public will also be able to respond formally in writing or by e-mail. Full details as to how people can respond will be included in the consultation document.
- (iv) To date there has been no spend in respect of this year's budgetary allocation of £8m. This is in line with our projections of spend up to this point in the financial year.
- (v, vi, vii, viii, ix) The consultation document will outline all of the proposed governance and administrative arrangements associated with the Social Investment Fund.

Childcare Services: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the delay in the allocation of funding for childcare services which was included in the budget; and when this funding will be made available.

(AQW 1522/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Decisions on the allocation of the additional £3m per annum for childcare secured in the 2010 Budget settlement are currently being discussed and finalised.

Ethnic Minority Development Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their plans for the Ethnic Minority Development Fund beyond September 2011; and whether the funding stream will be available for groups working with ethnic minority groups after this date.

(AQW 1528/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have recently commissioned an evaluation of the current Fund. Funding beyond September 2011 will depend on the outcome of that evaluation.

Racial Equality Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the new Racial Equality Strategy and the accompanying budget will be finalised and published by March 2012.

(AQW 1529/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We hope to publish the new Racial Equality Strategy in March or April 2012.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether money from the Social Investment Fund will be made available to assist migrants who through no fault of their own find themselves destitute with no recourse to public funds.

(AQW 1530/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Programmes will be targeted at those communities most in need. The Executive agreed a strategic paper on the Social Investment Fund which is available on the OFMDFM website at:

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/strategic-paper-on-the-social-investment-fund.pdf.

This outlines some proposed governance and administrative arrangements including criteria for funding and criteria for determining the localities to which funding will be allocated.

We are aiming to issue a more detailed paper for consultation over the summer. This will help inform the process.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is her Department's definition of rural development; and what criteria is used to classify a (i) village; (ii) town; and (iii) townland as "rural" and therefore eligible for rural development assistance.

(AQW 1282/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department does not have a formal definition of rural development and adopts a more flexible approach where rural development can improve the quality of life in rural areas but can also encompass the broad range of measures included in the current Rural Development Programme.

In the context of the Rural Development Programme, "rural" is defined as settlements with a population of 4,500 or less. This definition was developed and agreed by a cross departmental working group, working in conjunction with NISRA in 2005. There are occasions when projects in areas of greater than 4,500 can be supported where it is shown that, by supporting the project, the benefit will be largely rural.

Other than the restriction of 4,500 mentioned above, the Rural Development Programme does not distinguish between village, town and townland.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when farmers whose land is being investigated for the likely causes of fires will have their Single Farm Payment files released and the payments made.

(AQW 1330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Investigation into the causes of recent gorse fires is a matter for the NI Fire and Rescue Service and Police Service of NI and it is not for DARD to consider the likely cause of the fires.

In line with EU Regulations, 2011 Single Farm Payments (SFP) can start to issue from 1 December 2011 onwards. 2011 SFP applications are currently being validated and processed.

It is possible that, as result of the fires, some land that was previously eligible for SFP may not now be eligible or that the land may not now meet with the requirements for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC).

To date my Department has received around 240 requests from farmers to set normal scheme rules aside under force majeure provisions because the fires have affected their land. My Department will carefully consider these requests alongside their 2011 SFP claim. Farmers will be notified of the outcome of these applications in due course.

Export Certificates

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the rationale behind the plans to allow private companies to award export certificates instead of her Department; and for her assessment of the impact this will have on the credibility of the certificates.

(AQW 1333/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Exports of live animals and all other products of animal origin from the north, with the exception of meat and dairy, are certified by authorised Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs). This has resulted in an inequality in the export industry with one sector bearing the cost of certification and another not.

I have not yet reached a decision on how best to address this inequality. I am presently weighing up all the options and will give due consideration to the industry's suggestions on how best to move forward.

I do not anticipate that any of the options under consideration will have a detrimental impact on the credibility of the certificates. Certification is already being carried out by authorised PVPs for animals and products, being exported all over the world, without issue. All veterinary certification is carried out under professional rules laid down in European law and regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. In addition all PVPs carrying out this work will have to be fully trained and approved by my officials prior to carrying out certification duties. My officials will continue to undertake an audit role to support the transfer and to ensure that the integrity of certification is maintained.

Finally, DARD staff will also continue to provide a troubleshooting service to assist the industry if they have difficulties meeting importing Country's conditions. This combination of training and support will ensure the current credibility and standards of certification are maintained.

Food Labelling

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the claim that the Republic of Ireland's National Food Labelling Scheme is being used to prohibit imports of Northern Ireland produce and to pressurise retailers in the Republic of Ireland not to sell Northern Ireland produce. **(AQW 1334/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: I am not aware of the specific scheme to which you refer. You will note however that food labelling in the north of Ireland is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency via the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I welcome the important trade in food products here and in the south which has developed over the years and consider that we should foster such developments for the benefit of producers both north and south. My own view is that a joint approach to marketing of products from the island of Ireland would benefit all farmers.

Commercial trading matters are not for Government but for the parties concerned, while issues affecting competition are reserved. Nonetheless, any scheme supported by state funds should not only meet EC State Aid rules, which place restraints on the use of Government funds to promote produce based on its origin, but should also be administered within the spirit of the single European market, where normal market forces are expected to function without restraint.

Rural Development Action Plan

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQO 123/11-15, why the Rural Development Action Plan does not include any mention of forestry or delivering her Department's commitment to double woodland cover in the next 50 years. **(AQW 1381/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The good work of the Forest Service is adequately captured in my Department's Strategic and Business Plans and therefore my predecessor, Michelle Gildernew MP MLA, when launching the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan for consultation saw no need to duplicate commitments on forestry by referencing them in the draft paper.

You will be aware that the Rural White Paper Action Plan is an Executive document containing specific commitments by all Departments, not just DARD, across a wide range of rural issues.

Capital Projects for North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years. **(AQW 1388/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The Department will carry out a number of capital investment projects within the North Down constituency over the next three years. The current position in respect of planned capital projects is shown on Table 1, below.

Additional capital investments may be funded over the budget period; however, at this stage, commitments have not yet been confirmed.

TABLE 1 - The Capital investment projects planned for the South Antrim constituency.

Project	Description
Capital Grants, Axis 1: Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP)	Farm Modernisation Programme: investment in new plant and machinery - 1 project in the 2011/12 financial year.
Capital Grants: Axis 3 NIRDP	Diversification of Farm Businesses – 2 projects both in the 2011/12 financial year. Tourism Activities – 1 project in the 2011/12 financial year.
Capital grants: Fisheries Division	European Fisheries Fund: Lobster V notching programme will fund projects in 2011/12 and 2012/13. Vessel Modernisation will fund projects in 2011/12.

River Agency's Business Plan: Key Objective 2.1

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline Key Objective 2.1 of the River Agency's Business Plan; and for her assessment of whether this objective is on target to be met. **(AQW 1405/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: Key Objective 2 of my Rivers Agency's Business Plan is to progress the implementation of the European Directive for the assessment and management of flood risks. Target 2.1 requires the completion of at least 40% of Flood Risk and Flood Hazard maps and the commencement of 2 Flood Risk Management Plans. These are the year 3 actions in a 6 year plan to implement the EU Floods Directive by 2015. The Flood Risk and Flood Hazard maps are to consider 3 scenarios, namely high, medium, and low probability flood events. They will also provide a clear indication of the likely impacts of flooding on inhabitants, economic activity and vulnerable pollution sources. The Flood Risk Management Plans will develop the mapped information to provide catchment-specific objectives and measures that will ensure that the risks are proactively managed. The plans will include input from central government Departments and Agencies, councils, local communities and other interest groups because flood risk can only be effectively managed by the collective and joined-up efforts of all involved.

I am confident of meeting this key objective and the overall implementation of the EU Floods Directive.

Woodland Creation Targets

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the initial PSA target in the Forestry Service Business Plan of creating 1600 hectares of new woodland area between 2008 and 2011 was reduced to less than 800 hectares. **(AQW 1407/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The new PSA target of 800 hectares of new woodland creation is a realistic and achievable target which reflects the recent uptake of woodland creation grants by landowners and is affordable given capital budgetary constraints.

While our current Forestry Strategy (2006) has a long-term aim of doubling the area of woodland over the next 50 years, it also acknowledges the strong desire that farmers have to continuing farming. This means that woodland expansion is likely to be slow in the early years of the 50 year period.

During the 2008-11 PSA period, we continued to actively promote woodland creation. We increased grant rates significantly in November 2009 and announced that land converted to forestry under woodland schemes from January 2009 may be eligible for the Single Farm Payment Scheme. This resulted in 754 hectares of new woodland being created against the target from the period of 1650 hectares.

My Department will continue to actively promote woodland creation through its forestry grant schemes and develop new mechanisms to support higher levels of woodland creation compared to that achieved during the previous PSA period.

Soil Types and Soil Fertility: Experiments

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any of the research facilities which are funded by her Department are carrying out experiments on soil types and soil fertility. **(AQW 1450/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is the main research provider for my department. AFBI carries out experimental work on both soil type classification and numerous aspects of soil fertility. For example, The AFBI Soil Survey systematically studied the soil types present throughout the north of Ireland. This work resulted in the production of a series of maps, books and extensive digital datasets. Further information on this work is available on the AFBI website at <http://www.afbini.gov.uk/index/services/services-specialist-advice/soils-environment.htm>

As regards soil fertility, AFBI carries out soil nutrient research work for DARD to investigate the effects of nutrient and fertiliser application on the soil types available within the north of Ireland and support improved management of crop nutrition in the local agrifood sector.

Hydroponics

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has undertaken development proposals in the area of hydroponics in the last five years. **(AQW 1451/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: My department has not undertaken any developmental proposals in the area of hydroponics in the last five years. However, prior to this period DARD funded research at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to investigate the use of hydroponics in potato propagation.

Additionally, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) has, in the past, demonstrated the growing of peppers and tomatoes in hydroponics.

Terra Preta Soils

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, over the last five years, whether any research facilities which are funded by her Department have been involved in the development of terra preta soils similar to those found in the Amazon basin which are high in fertility, self-regenerating and can increase their own volume.

(AQW 1452/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My department has not funded any research facilities to undertake research into the development of terra preta soils in the last five years. However, Defra is currently co-funding research to assess the impacts of adding biochar to land. The results of this work will be available in late 2014 and we will monitor the outcome.

Agri-food Business Opportunities

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's plans to generate agri-food business opportunities.

(AQW 1453/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am grateful for this opportunity to outline my Department's plans to generate agrifood business opportunities. Since taking up office, I have consistently outlined my belief that the agrifood sector has a key role in the development of the wider economy.

As an economic Department, DARD, working in partnership with others, has a critical role in supporting the agri-food sector to become more market-led, to increase productivity and to move forward with confidence in playing an important part in building an export-led economic recovery.

My Department's main financial mechanism to support the sector in developing business opportunities is the Rural Development Programme, through the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme, which provides support towards capital investment. Along with the Supply Chain Development Programme, these schemes are together worth approximately £23m.

Further support is provided through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) including dedicated food technologists and a food incubation centre at Loughry campus, to support agri-food businesses develop innovative products, while scientific research support is available through AFBI.

DETI, Invest NI and DEL also have a key role to play in the economic and skills development of the food industry. As a result of working collaboratively across Government with industry representatives, last year, my predecessor and Minister Foster launched the Focus on Food Strategy which set out a vision for a thriving and sustainable agri-food sector. The time is now right for us to work together to develop this good work into a longer term strategy for the sector. I, and my Department, am committed to playing a key role alongside our industry partners and other Government departments to support and develop the agri-food sector.

Rural Business Opportunities

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff in her Department are engaged in the development of rural business opportunities.

(AQW 1454/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of 8.1 full time equivalent (FTE) staff within my Department are directly engaged in the development of rural business opportunities. This includes 5.8 FTE Rural Enterprise staff, who provide farmers and others with advice on various DARD support services and programmes, and incorporates business advice and mentoring services for farmers and their families to facilitate farm diversification. In addition 2.3 FTE CAFRE staff provide, through the Diversification Challenge Programme, detailed training and guidance to assist farmers in devising and implementing diversification plans aimed at producing successful rural businesses.

For completeness, Axes 1 and 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 contain a number of funding measures to support rural businesses, but development work associated with these measures is undertaken by outside delivery bodies rather than by DARD staff.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the complaint by the European Court of Auditors that deficiencies in the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme allows subsidies to be awarded to people who do little or no farming; and how her Department monitors Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 1463/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the recently published report from the European Court of Auditors and the criticism it makes in terms of the payment of Single Farm Payment to certain recipients. The report refers to the current definition of a farmer in EU legislation which includes a person who maintains land in good agricultural and environmental condition and recommends that the legislation be amended to ensure that SFP is directed to active farmers only.

At present, my Department has to apply the existing definition of a farmer as set out in EU legislation but the Commission has made clear that this issue will be under consideration in the forthcoming CAP Reform negotiations.

As required by the EU legislation, my Department monitors Single Farm Payment through both administrative and on-the-spot checks to ensure compliance with the scheme requirements. The

administrative checks are carried out on all applications received while the on-the-spot checks are carried out on a minimum of 5% of claimants each year. These on-farm inspections verify that eligibility requirements have been met, for example, that land is accessible and in agricultural use.

All-Ireland Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the costs associated with her Department's All-Ireland Unit in each year since its establishment.

(AQW 1480/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Central Management Branch within the department carries out a wide range of activities in support of the machinery of government including North South matters. Within this Branch a number of staff were designated to form a North South unit in May 2009. Involvement in North South matters forms only part of the overall duties and responsibilities of those designated staff.

The nature and extent of staff engagement on North South matters varies throughout the year (reflecting the volume of work associated with cross-border issues). Staff within Central Management Branch do not operate a time & task recording system and it is therefore not possible to disaggregate the specific costs associated solely with North South matters from those of other Departmental activities.

Soil Types: Survey

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department or its arm's-length bodies have carried out any surveys on soil types in the last twelve months.

(AQW 1514/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Neither my department nor its arm's-length bodies have carried out soil type survey work in the last twelve months.

However an extensive survey of the soil types present in the north of Ireland was carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) approximately twelve years ago, resulting in the publication of a number of maps, books and digital datasets. Further information on this work is available on the AFBI website at: <http://www.afbini.gov.uk/index/services/services-specialist-advice/soils-environment.htm>

Soil Improvement Programmes

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department or its arm's-length bodies have carried out any soil improvement programmes in the last twelve months.

(AQW 1515/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No specific soil improvement programmes have been carried out by my department or its arm's-length bodies in the past twelve months. However, DARD funds soil nutrient research work at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to investigate the effects of nutrient and fertiliser application on the soil types available within the north of Ireland and support improved management of crop nutrition in the local agri-food sector.

In addition, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) continues to emphasise the importance of maintaining and improving soil structure, drainage and fertility to students through education programmes and to other agri-food-sector stakeholders through press articles, management notes and industry training programmes. For example, over the 2010/11 winter period, CAFRE delivered a series of over 40 Nutrient Management Planning workshops across the north of Ireland. These were designed to update farmers on how to reduce fertiliser costs by making full use of the nutrients in soil and in slurry and manure. Further Nutrient Management Planning Workshops will be delivered over the 2011/12 winter period.

Furthermore, online Farm Nutrient Management Calculators developed by CAFRE and AFBI, are available at <http://eservices.ruralni.gov.uk/onlineservices/FarmNutrient/FarmNutrient.asp>. These allow farmers to maximise the use of soil nutrients for crop growth, minimise the use of fertiliser and protect the environment.

Land Use

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of (i) arable land; (ii) pasture; and (iii) upland currently in agricultural use.

(AQW 1516/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The results of the 2010 June Agricultural and Horticultural Survey indicate that there were 55,600 ha of arable crops that year (comprising cereals, other field crops and horticultural crops). There were 780,000 ha of pasture (comprising permanent and temporary grassland) and a further 140,500 ha of rough grazing, plus 36,800 ha of common land.

The Agricultural and Horticultural Survey does not define, or collect information on, an Upland category.

The area of crops, grass, rough grazing and other land (excluding common grazing) in the Severely Disadvantaged Area in 2010 was 453,500 ha.

Market Garden Enterprises

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many market garden enterprises currently operate in Northern Ireland; (ii) how much land is dedicated to market gardening; and (iii) how much land was dedicated to market gardening ten years ago.

(AQW 1517/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not collect statistics under the term 'market garden enterprises', but does collect statistics on horticultural enterprises. Results from DARD's 2010 June Agricultural and Horticultural survey, indicated that there were 289 horticultural businesses in the north of Ireland. This was comprised of vegetables, top fruit (predominantly Bramley apple) and other horticultural crops but excluded specialist mushroom units.

Results from DARD's 2010 Agricultural and Horticultural survey indicate that 2,900ha of horticultural crops were grown in the north. Of this there were approximately 1,300ha of vegetables, 1,500ha of top fruit and 100ha of ornamentals.

The DARD Agricultural and Horticultural survey for 2001 indicated that approximately 3,100ha of land was associated with horticulture businesses in the north ten years ago. Some 1,500ha of vegetables, 1,500ha of top fruit and 100ha in ornamentals.

Farmers' Markets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers' markets are currently operational in Northern Ireland; and what plans her Department has to expand this sector.

(AQW 1518/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no oversight or regulatory role with regard to Farmers' Markets and therefore holds no statistics on their number or location. The regulation of farmers' markets is primarily the responsibility of local government. I am therefore unable to provide the breakdown sought.

The majority of existing markets are run by Councils or other private bodies /organisations, and each market has its own criteria and eligibility requirements. My Department has provided financial support to a number of farmers' markets in the past under previous funding programmes, most notably in Derry, Ballymoney and Strabane. Opportunities for current support to farmers' markets exist under the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013, although this is dependent upon the priorities set within the local development strategies carried forward by the Local Action Groups and Council clusters.

DARD's Regional Food Programme also offers financial support to local councils, regional food groups and agri-food representatives for, amongst other things, the staging of speciality food markets to promote quality, local produce. As well as these funding possibilities DARD has a role to develop the capability of farmer/producers to add value to their produce and to assist them to access routes to market through technical advice and support.

Childcare Pilots

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she has taken to ensure that her Department's childcare pilots can continue.

(AQW 1521/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Childcare Programme was launched in 2009 by my predecessor, Michelle Gildernew, in response to the recommendations of the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and as a result of rural childcare having been highlighted as a key priority in the Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Framework 2008/09-2010/11. A key requirement for applicants was that their pilot or demonstration project could be completed by March 2011 so as to inform the programme evaluation which was the key programme output. The programme evaluation is underway and when complete will be provided to the relevant government departments with responsibility for childcare to influence the development of future policy, priorities and in particular the new Childcare Strategy for the north.

As you know my predecessor wrote to the First and deputy First Ministers earlier this year outlining the need to urgently identify a lead department to work on the new childcare strategy and to look at ways to support groups providing a valuable childcare service whilst the strategy is under development. I will continue to press the importance of this matter and also for the need for the strategy to take account of the very specific circumstances of rural areas.

Ministerial Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which she selected her Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates and how did she ensure that it was 'broadly based' as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (iv) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

(AQW 1549/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the process to appoint Special Advisers. I can assure the Member that the appointment was carried out in line with established procedures and the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ministerial Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she or her Party selected Mary McArdle as her Special Adviser.

(AQW 1420/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I appointed Mary McArdle as my Special Adviser.

Ministerial Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which she selected her Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates and how did she ensure that it was 'broadly based' as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (iv) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

(AQW 1476/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

Department of Education

Relocation of WELB Posts to Belfast

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's plans to relocate posts from the Western Education and Library Board offices in Derry and Omagh to offices in Belfast, to detail (i) the estimated annual savings as a result of the centralisation of these posts; (ii) how the centralisation of these posts correlates with his Department's and the Executive's commitment to decentralisation; and (iii) the financial package offered to employees in the posts which are to be centralised, including relocation costs and travel expenses.

(AQW 1158/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Whilst there is no agreed Executive policy on decentralisation, I fully support equality in distribution of, and access to, public sector jobs.

In relation to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's plans to relocate posts from the Western Board area, CCEA's interim Chief Executive has confirmed that the process of reviewing working arrangements is currently under consultation with the affected staff and all costs and savings will be determined by the outcome of this review.

Preschool and P1 Places

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the admissions criteria and procedures used by primary schools to determine applications for a (a) preschool place; and (b) P1 place; and (ii) whether principals have a degree of flexibility in accepting such applications.

(AQW 1413/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The admissions criteria and procedures used by primary schools to determine applications for a (a) pre-school place; and (b) Year 1 place are outlined below.

Pre-school Places

In determining the admissions criteria to all Department of Education (DE) funded pre-school places, DE specifies two priorities i.e.

- social disadvantage – because research has shown that those children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience more difficulty at school than other children; and
- 4-year-olds with July and August birthdays – because these children do not enter compulsory education until after their 5th birthday.

This targeting process, which is part of DE's wider strategy to reduce levels of educational underachievement in the long-term, has been in operation since the 1999/2000 school year.

Pre-school settings must then set their own criteria to select children down to the last available place when too many children apply to a provider. These include a range of factors such as proximity to the school, chronological age, or being the eldest or the only child in a family. These criteria are entirely at the discretion of the individual school and are not determined by DE.

Year 1 Places

Article 16(1) for the Education (NI) Order 1997 requires the Board of Governors of each grant-aided school to draw up criteria to be applied in selecting children for admission to their school.

Consequently each school's admissions criteria are unique and reflect the Governors' priority for admission to their school. . However, the Primary Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations (NI) 1997 require that the admissions criteria include the order of priority in which pupils shall be admitted to the school, priority for children who will have attained compulsory school age and priority for children who are resident in the north of Ireland. The regulations also require that the admissions criteria shall not include provision for the selection of pupils by reference to ability or aptitude.

- (ii) Primary schools must consider all applications for admissions and admit pupils up to their approved enrolment number (pre-school) and admissions number (Year 1). In schools which are oversubscribed, application forms for children who have not been accepted for admission at their first preference school are made available to the parents' second preference school via the education and library boards. This process is repeated for third preference schools etc. until all pupils are placed.

While the admissions process is running schools must reassess the rank order established at first preference stage, when second preferences are received, in order to take account of whether any of these second preference candidates meet a higher criterion than the first preference candidates already considered. This process must happen regardless of whether or not the school has places available within the admissions number at that stage in the admissions process. The school must repeat this process with every subsequent set of applications through third, fourth, fifth preference stages. A school cannot consider itself to have reached a final and conclusive rank order until all applications, regardless of preference, have been received, the school's criteria have been applied to those candidates and the admissions process has closed.

Capital Projects for North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1441/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At this point in time I am not in a position to indicate which major capital investment projects will be taken forward in the next three years. My Department is faced with significant reductions in the capital budget available over the next four years and this will impact on the ability to deliver new school building projects, including those in the North Down constituency.

Construction of a new school for Bangor Grammar, representing an investment of almost £19.5 million, commenced in February 2011 and is due for completion in February 2013.

The Holywood Schools and St Columbanus' College projects are currently listed on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The Holywood scheme includes a new nursery school, a new primary school to replace Redburn and Holywood Primary Schools and a replacement school for Priory College. In addition, Bangor Central Integrated Primary School is one of a large number of projects at the early stages of planning but for which have not been announced for funding.

I will be considering how to make best use of the capital funds available to address the most pressing needs and to maximise educational benefits for children and young people. When I have considered the options it would be my intention to make a statement to the Assembly on the way forward for the school building programme.

Free Transport For Pupils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education why there is a distinction made between free transport for pupils at post-primary schools and further education colleges.

(AQW 1474/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Legislation (Schedule 13 paragraph 3(2)(b) of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as substituted by Article 23 of The Education (NI) Order 1997) governing school transport makes it clear that the basis of the service is to ensure that parents will always have a school that is accessible

to their child – given the broadly compulsory nature of school attendance. DE policy then ensures that the same transport-assistance provision supports pre and post-16 study in schools as they broadly require the same pattern of attendance.

The Department for Employment and Learning is responsible for transport provision for pupils in attendance at colleges of further education and for determining those college pupils who qualify for this provision. Unlike schools, FE provision does not always require a specific pattern of attendance, which may obviously impact on transport requirements. Students following a full-time course at a Further Education College who are under 19 years of age on the day they commence their course of study and whose home is located over the statutory qualifying distance of three miles from any college are eligible for travel assistance to attend a course in their local Further Education College.

The main distinction, with schools transport policy however is that in terms of FE provision, students may also choose a course of study, which is not available locally. In these circumstances eligible students may elect to attend another FE College and they will qualify for a travel pass or travel allowance, of equivalent value. One of the qualifying conditions is that their local college must provide written confirmation that they cannot be accommodated.

Students aged 19 and over attending Further Education Colleges may also be eligible for assistance with travel costs through a hardship fund, which is means tested.

Teachers' Education

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of teachers are educated to at least second class degree level.

(AQW 1542/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department contacted the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) to obtain the information.

The GTCNI has advised that in order to register with the Council an applicant is required to hold a Degree and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education or a Bachelor of Education, or equivalent.

All teachers registered with the GTCNI are graduates. The current data held by the GTCNI on degree classification is incomplete and the Council is currently working to update and obtain complete data on teachers' initial teaching qualification and degree classification however this exercise will take some considerable time to complete.

Ministerial Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which he selected his Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates and how did he ensure that it was 'broadly based' as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (iv) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

(AQW 1548/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The DE Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

Department for Employment and Learning

South Eastern Regional College: Timetabling

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware that PricewaterhouseCoopers has conducted an investigation into irregular contracts and the timetabling of classes at the South Eastern Regional College; and if so, when does he intend to publish the report.
(AQW 1272/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Governing Body of the South Eastern Regional College has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), as the internal audit service for the college, to independently validate an internal review by the college into a recent whistleblowing episode. My Department expects to receive a copy of the PWC investigation report in due course, the findings of which will determine the way forward. In terms of publication, that would be a matter for the Governing Body of the college.

South Eastern Regional College: Allegations of Falsifying Contracts

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware of a person or persons at the South Eastern Regional College falsifying contracts for part-time lecturers and the completion of electronic registers; and if so, when he intends to refer this matter to the Public Accounts Committee for investigation.
(AQW 1273/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Governing Body of the South Eastern Regional College has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), as the internal audit service for the college, to independently validate an internal review by the college into a recent whistleblowing episode. My Department expects to receive a copy of the PWC investigation report in due course, the findings of which will determine the way forward. In terms of publication, that would be a matter for the Governing Body of the college.

Further Education Colleges: Full-time Equivalent Student Count

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how each further education college determines its full-time equivalent student count.
(AQW 1292/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each Further Education College uses the formula detailed below to determine the Full-Time Equivalent student (FTE) count.

$$\text{FTE student} = \frac{\text{Number of Full-time students} + \text{Total number of student hours}}{\text{Divisor for respective Course Group}}$$

Further Education Colleges: Reform of Governing Bodies

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) what plans he has to reform the governing bodies of further education colleges; (ii) when these plans will be made public; and (iii) the timescale for the implementation of any such plans.
(AQW 1294/11-15)

Dr Farry: In November 2010, my Department completed a review of Further Education governance and issued its recommendations to the Further Education sector, for consideration. The review took account of developments in FE governance in other jurisdictions and, importantly, reflected the findings of a report by the Northern Ireland Assembly's Public Accounts Committee that was published in July 2009.

The Department is working with the sector to take forward the review's recommendations. A number of these, principally relating to the composition of Governing Bodies, will require amendment to the Further Education (NI) Order 1997. Proposals for any such amendments would require public consultation.

Wherever possible, recommendations will be implemented in the course of the 2011/12 academic year, beginning with a code of governance to clarify roles and responsibilities. Any proposals that are subject to a process of legislative amendment will also be identified during 2011/12.

North West Regional College: Industrial Relations

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware of the industrial relations situation at the North West Regional College; and whether he is considering carrying out an investigation into events at the college.

(AQW 1295/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am fully aware of the industrial relations situation at the North West Regional College. As an incorporated statutory body, the college is responsible for all employment related matters including determining staffing complements, managing performance and staff discipline.

However, I can confirm that I have asked the College's Governing Body to instigate, as a matter of urgency, an independent review of the disciplinary and redundancy procedures at the college.

Apprenticeship Placements

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures are in place to safeguard apprenticeship places during the economic downturn.

(AQW 1321/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of apprenticeship places in Northern Ireland is determined by employers based on the needs of their business and of the industry. To encourage employers to continue to recruit and retain apprentices, my Department has ensured that the financial incentive for employers has remained unchanged. The apprenticeship training package on offer to employers is attractive, in that the apprentices' directed training costs are met by my Department. This can range between £2,600 and £10,800 depending on the level and occupational area of study and, on completion, an incentive bonus of up to £1,500 is paid to the employer.

As a direct response to the economic downturn contingency arrangements were introduced in November 2008 to allow apprentices who were made redundant in the construction, engineering and motor vehicle sectors to continue with training.

Furthermore, Departmental officials are engaged proactively with Central Procurement Directorate and other Departments to encourage the use of social clauses requiring the employment of apprentices in the delivery of public sector contracts.

New College Campus in Coleraine

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) any plans he has for a new college campus in the Coleraine area; and (ii) when he expects work on any new campus to commence.

(AQW 1331/11-15)

Dr Farry: The renewal of the Northern Regional College's Coleraine campus is a priority for my Department and was included in the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland 2008 to 2018. A bid for capital to fund renewal of the Coleraine campus was made in Budget 2010 but this bid was not met. I will continue to keep Coleraine amongst my priorities and will be including the need for funding for the Coleraine campus in the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland 2011 to 2021, due later this year. As such, there is no date planned for the work to commence.

Links with Further and Higher Education Colleges and Universities in Israel

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration his Department has given to (i) the potential of research and development and innovation links with further and higher education colleges and universities in Israel; and (ii) the potential for relationships between local further and higher education colleges and universities and their Israeli counterparts.

(AQW 1351/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) My Department is responsible for funding research and knowledge transfer activities within Northern Ireland's higher education institutions and further education colleges. The universities, in particular, use this funding, among other things, to form and develop many strong international research collaborations. However, it is a matter for them, rather than my Department, to determine the potential for such collaborations with Israel.
- (ii) Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland are responsible for developing their own international partnerships and links with countries around the world, including Israel. Such links are focused on promoting academic partnerships for mutual learning and ensuring that Northern Ireland is to the fore in benefiting from higher education international linkages. The Department recognises the value and worth of such initiatives and encourages our institutions to maximise their potential.

Both Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster have for many years engaged in educational partnerships with institutions in both Israel and Palestine.

St. Mary's University College has links with the University of Haifa and both St. Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges have recently undertaken a study visit to the David Yellin College of Education in Jerusalem to explore conflict resolution.

The six Further Education Colleges do not currently have any links.

with further and higher education colleges and universities in Israel.

However, South West College has indicated that it may have the potential to collaborate with Israeli institutions in the future through the College's InnoTech Centre.

STEM Subject Degrees

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he intends to take to ensure the provision of STEM subject degrees at further and higher education colleges in rural areas.

(AQW 1419/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department promotes the provision of higher education courses in STEM subjects in the Further Education Regional Colleges in a number of ways. Through the Higher Education in Further Education funding mechanisms, additional funding "weighting" is applied to subjects related to key economic priority areas, including courses in STEM subjects.

In addition, my officials monitor the curriculum offer in each Regional College as part of the annual College Development Plan (CDP) process. Where appropriate, my Department may re-allocate full-time higher education places across the colleges to support key strategic priorities such as STEM. A college's maximum allocation of student numbers, (MaSN), is based on established current and future demand for higher education in each of the college areas; the college's alignment with the Department's strategic priority areas as demonstrated in the College Development Plan; and support for the Department's Widening Participation goals in the geographical distribution of higher education places across Northern Ireland.

It is the responsibility of each individual college to manage its Higher Education funding allocations in line with local priorities, as well as the priorities set by my Department. However, decisions relating to the management of courses and the allocation of student places across the college's campuses are matters for the senior management of the regional college and not for my Department.

My Department is fully committed to the delivery of the inter-Departmental strategy for the promotion of STEM. You will be aware that the strategy was brought to the Executive in March 2011 and agreement was gained to publish it. An associated STEM Implementation Plan is being produced and both documents are expected to be published in autumn 2011. In addition, and subject to funding considerations, I would propose that any increases in student numbers at our universities would only be in areas of economic relevance, including STEM.

Education Groups in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the education groups in the North Down area which are currently funded by his Department.

(AQW 1448/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are no education groups in the North Down area funded by this Department. However, there are two organisations located in the North Down area, which are currently contracted by the Department to deliver Training for Success and/or ApprenticeshipsNI programmes:

Conservation Volunteers NI
Dendron Lodge
Clandeboyne Estate
BANGOR
Co Down
BT19 1RN; and

Rutledge Recruitment and Training
46-48 High Street
BANGOR
Co Down
BT20 5AJ

Further and Higher Education in the Mid-Ulster Area

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans there are for investment in further and higher education in the Mid-Ulster area.

(AQW 1500/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department funds Further and Higher Education in the Mid Ulster area which is delivered at the Magherafelt campus of the Northern Regional College and the Cookstown campus of the South West College. In 2011/2012, the Northern Regional College will receive £21m in Block Grant and the South West College will receive £16m. This funding is across all of the colleges' campuses and cannot be broken down by individual campus. No applications for capital funding were received for the 2010 Spending Review and my Department has no plans for Capital Investment in the area in the period to 2014/15.

Travel Payments to Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the policy on travel payments to students who study at a Further Education College (FEC) outside their geographical area because the course they are studying is not available at an FEC within their geographical area.

(AQW 1532/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Home to College Transport budget, administered by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on behalf of the Department for Employment and Learning, is used to facilitate the attendance of eligible students at Further Education Colleges. Home to College Transport is implemented on the basis of Article 52 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as substituted by Article 23 of The Education (NI) Order 1997 as detailed in the Department of Education's policy (DE Circular 1996/41 amended September 2009).

Students following a full-time course at a Further Education College who are under 19 years of age on the day they commence their course of study and whose home is located over the statutory qualifying distance of three miles from any college are eligible for travel assistance to attend course in their local Further Education College.

Where a student's home address is less than the statutory qualifying distance from their nearest college they may still qualify for assistance to travel to another college. This assistance is provided where the proposed course of study is not available locally and confirmation of this is provided by that college. The travel assistance provided to all students will either be in the form of a travel pass or a travel allowance which is normally equivalent to the travel pass rate.

Students aged 19 and over attending Further Education Colleges may also be eligible for assistance with travel costs through a hardship fund. This is means tested assistance, aimed at providing financial help to students including those with a disability, who are inhibited by financial considerations from accessing and participating in Further Education. The Hardship Fund is a discretionary budget which provides assistance with a range of living costs and as such has no specific budget for transport.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Milk Cup Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's figures showing that as a result of the Milk Cup 2010 accommodation providers gained £426,000, visitor spend amounted to £395,000 and participant spend accumulated to £312,000, for her assessment of whether the Milk Cup makes a vital contribution to the local tourism industry; and what steps she intends to take to ensure the long-term sustainability of this event through appropriate funding.

(AQW 882/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Milk Cup organisers applied to the NITB Tourism Events Fund for 2011/12. The application did not score highly enough across all the objective criteria to warrant an award of funding this year. However recognising the importance of this event to the North Coast area I undertook to consider alternative sources of funding. To this end I raised the issue with my Executive colleagues who, recognising the event's impact on sports development, tourism, international relations, children and young people, decided that funding of £40,000 should be awarded to the Milk Cup in 2011.

The Executive also recognised that the long term sustainability of the Milk Cup must be considered as public funds cannot be permanently guaranteed for any particular event. Funding for 2011 is therefore conditional on the organisers taking part in an independent research survey on visitor numbers and economic impact and also acting upon a commerciality strategy to ensure an appropriate and sustainable funding mix across the public and private sector in the future.

InterTrade Ireland Workforce

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of staff employed by InterTradeIreland; and (ii) the religious background of staff employed by InterTradeIreland in (a) Northern Ireland; and (b) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1261/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) InterTradeIreland employ 43 staff (42.3 on a full time basis);
- (ii) Of the 43 staff employed by InterTradeIreland 9 are Protestant, 33 are Roman Catholic and 1 Other.
- (iii) All staff are employed in Northern Ireland. InterTradeIreland does not employ staff in the Republic of Ireland.

Welcome Signs and Demarcation Signs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Minister for Regional Development, she will introduce a policy requiring welcome signs and demarcation signs to be erected where the territory of Northern Ireland begins on all main routes.

(AQW 1302/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Welcome to Northern Ireland signs are classified as tourist signs. DRD Roads Service has an agreed tourist signing policy in place with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and local councils.

Under the Northern Ireland Tourist Signing Policy the provision of tourist signs is Council-led with all enquiries directed to Councils and subsequently considered by Roads Service in conjunction with NITB.

I believe there should be a change to the current policy on tourist signing.

Single Electricity Market

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of whether there was a trend of convergence in domestic prices between Northern Ireland and Great Britain prior to the introduction of the single electricity market on the island of Ireland; (ii) whether the single electricity market divergence has been to the detriment of Northern Ireland customers; and (iii) to detail local electricity prices compared to Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1305/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Electricity prices in Northern Ireland have always tended to be higher than those in Great Britain. After many years of significant difference, there was a trend towards convergence in the period immediately prior to the introduction of the Single Electricity Market (SEM). However, in the post-SEM period, there has been a divergence once again. In comparing electricity prices between Northern Ireland and Great Britain it is necessary to take into account the different nature and size of the respective markets along with the different operating costs involved.

The Single Electricity Market (SEM) continues to run the cheapest generators available to meet demand across the whole island, hence minimising overall electricity costs and affording protection to consumers. An independent cost benefit analysis has estimated a net benefit of £45million for Northern Ireland from the SEM, most of which will benefit consumers. The SEM has also delivered greater security of supply for Northern Ireland, and has encouraged new investment in efficient generation on the island. Additionally, the Utility Regulator has been able to cancel unfavourable legacy generation contracts in Northern Ireland, and it is estimated that this will save consumers in excess of £80million over the next 5 years alone. The SEM has also provided greater transparency and therefore encouraged increased electricity supply competition, evidenced by Airtricity entering the retail domestic electricity market in Northern Ireland in June 2010.

In almost all of the last 10 years, domestic electricity prices in Northern Ireland have been higher than domestic electricity prices in Great Britain. Between 2004 and 2007 electricity prices in Northern Ireland were higher than in the Irish Republic. However since 2008, domestic electricity prices have generally been lower in Northern Ireland than in the Republic.

My Department will continue to work with the Utility Regulator and the energy industry to support initiatives aimed at putting downward pressure on retail electricity costs, which along with new electricity interconnection between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and between Great Britain and the Republic, should see greater convergence between electricity prices as, in line with EU policy, greater market integration takes place.

NI Events Company

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the report on the NI Events Company carried out by the Company Inspectors will be made public.

(AQW 1345/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department appointed inspectors to the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited on 17 November 2008 under Article 452(2) and Article 425(2)(a) of the Companies (NI) Order 1986. Under Article 425(2)(a), any report the inspectors may make is not for publication. It is not the Department's policy, where it concerns a private company, to make available the inspectors findings.

Capital Projects: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1385/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI Property Solutions Unit has invested in the development of its North and South Balloo Business Parks to support the economic infrastructure of the North Down constituency. As a result of the work that has been completed, there are no capital projects planned over the next three years.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not received any applications for capital projects within the North Down Constituency. The Signature Projects Programme 2011 – 2013 is currently open until 31 August 2011 for applications from projects to complete the tourism Signature Projects.

Milk Cup and Foyle Cup Tournaments

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm the date (i) when the decision was taken to fund this year's Milk Cup and Foyle Cup tournaments; and (ii) when funding approval was communicated to the tournament organisers by her Department, or its agencies.

(AQW 1409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Funding for the Milk and Foyle Cups was discussed at the Executive meeting on 30 June 2011. Recognising the impact of these events on sports development, tourism, international relations, children and young people, the Executive decided that funding should be made available for both events in 2011.

I have identified £80,000 to fund both events in 2011 from my Department's budget, and event organisers were informed verbally on Friday 1 July 2011 that funding would be made available. A formal letter setting out the terms of the funding issued on 5 July 2011.

Economic Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will publish the Economic Strategy.

(AQW 1412/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The new Northern Ireland Economic Strategy continues to be developed by the Executive Sub-committee on the Economy. It is anticipated that a draft Strategy will be published for full public consultation later in the year.

Fuel Regulator

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she intends to consider a fuel regulator for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1447/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no current plans to extend the powers of the independent regulator. I will consider the outcome of the Office of Fair Trading review, due to be published in the autumn into the

competitiveness of the United Kingdom's home heating fuel sector for customers not connected to the natural gas network.

Renewable Energy Sources

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, based on current projections, what percentage of electricity needs will be met from renewable sources in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; (iii) 2014; (iv) 2015; and (v) 2016.

(AQW 1498/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Programme for Government has a target of 12% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2012, of which 15% should be from non-wind sources.

In the year 2011/12 to date, renewable electricity generation (as a percentage of total consumption) has averaged 10% with May alone being above 18%, due to the exceptionally windy conditions during that month. DETI believes that Northern Ireland remains on target to meet the 12% renewable energy target by 2012.

The Executive has agreed, through the Strategic Energy Framework, a target of 40% of electricity consumption to be from renewable sources by 2020. This is a technology neutral and market led target and the renewable energy mix by year cannot be determined at this point. The percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources in the period 2012-2016 will depend on the type of renewable technologies deployed, the weather conditions and the ability of the grid to absorb an increased amount of renewable generation.

Renewable Energy Facilities: Planning Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, to ensure that planning applications for renewable energy facilities are processed quickly and effectively.

(AQW 1499/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Sustainable Energy Inter-departmental Working Group (SEIDWG) has agreed the terms of reference and broad work plan for the planning and renewable energy sub-group which will be chaired by DETI and include representatives from DOE, DOE planning service, NIEA, and DARD. The group has a remit "to work together to ensure that renewable energy projects and installations are delivered, within the planning system, in time to meet Executive targets" and will also ensure implementation of the recommendations in the planning arena made by the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee.

Job Creation in the Mid-Ulster area

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps have been taken to encourage job creation through business start-up and expansion in the Mid-Ulster area.

(AQW 1502/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the last two years, Invest NI has offered almost £11 million of assistance for the development of new and expansion projects in the Mid-Ulster constituency. This will generate total investment in the area of £101 million, creating over 750 new jobs and safeguarding a further 340 posts.

Assistance has been offered to a range of foreign owned and indigenous companies and includes support for key businesses in the constituency such as New Terex, Dale Farm, SDC Trailers and Delwyn Enterprises.

Going forward, over the next four years, Invest NI will support the promotion of over 21,000 new jobs across Northern Ireland and will also implement a new Short Term Employment Scheme in direct response to the continued upward trend in unemployment. The measures contained within the Short Term Employment Scheme, which has a total budget of £18.8 million, will promote a further 5,000 new jobs by March 2015.

These measures will be implemented in conjunction with a range of other support from Invest NI including a continued focus on encouraging investment in research and development and innovation, business improvement, sustainable development and trade initiatives. Please be assured that we will continue to work with new and existing businesses in the Mid-Ulster constituency to create new jobs, enhance their international competitiveness and create more sustainable job opportunities.

Car Insurance for Young People

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations she has made to the Financial Services Authority on the high cost of car insurance for young people.

(AQW 1513/11-15)

Mrs Foster: None. Insurance is a reserved matter, outside the remit of my Department and, therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to make representations to the Financial Services Authority

NI Events Company: Investigation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) when her Department's Inspectorate began to investigate the NI Events Company; (ii) what the terms of reference for the investigation are; (iii) when the investigation will be completed; (iv) what the total cost has been to date; and (v) for her estimate of the final cost.

(AQW 1538/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- i) The Department appointed company inspectors to investigate the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited on 17 November 2008.
- ii) It is not the Department's policy to release the terms of reference for the appointment of inspectors as they largely consist of the complaints / allegations made to it.
- iii) The target date for completion is 30 June 2012.
- iv) The cost incurred to date by DETI is £474,000.
- v) Due to the complexity of the investigation it is difficult to forecast what the final cost is likely to be. All costs are however being tightly managed and controlled.

Department of the Environment

Listed Buildings in Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take in relation to the preservation of (i) the former Kelly's Coal Office building, Governors Place, Carrickfergus; and (ii) Prospect House, Carrickfergus, both of which are listed buildings.

(AQW 1252/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department has worked for many years to ensure the preservation of both of these buildings, which are on the Built Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland (BHARNI) register. Unfortunately, in both cases, previously agreed schemes to ensure a sustainable future have halted, because of difficulties encountered by their owners, due to the current economic climate.

As a result, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) Area Conservation Architect has been in contact with those currently responsible for both buildings, to ensure ongoing security and to encourage the development of new plans for a sustainable future.

In relation to solving the problems faced by both of these buildings, the long term solution is, of course, to find a new, sustainable, use for them. My Department, through the NIEA, funds the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society to employ an officer to encourage owners and groups to arrive at imaginative solutions to the issues faced by Buildings at Risk. He and officers from NIEA would be

happy to meet you to discuss and explore any ideas you may have to arrive at a solution to the issues faced by these buildings.

I understand that NIEA staff have already been in contact with the Carrickfergus Historical Society on a similar theme, as well as working along with Carrickfergus Building Control to encourage the current owner to improve the security of Prospect House in particular.

The long term solution of difficult cases, such as this, requires a partnership approach and the Department is willing to play its part in arriving at a long term solution. In this regard, NIEA organised a conference recently, with the voluntary sector, to address the issue of buildings at risk, and highlight how partnership with those in the voluntary/NGO sector is so often vital in order to make substantial progress on this important issue.

Committee on Climate Change

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will request a report from the Committee on Climate Change on the progress that Northern Ireland has made in meeting its climate change targets. **(AQW 1281/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: In February 2011 the Executive endorsed the Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan.

(http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_action_plan_on_greenhouse_gas_emissions_reductions.pdf)

The Action Plan sets out those activities to be undertaken by each NICS Department which will help lower emissions and contribute to the Programme for Government target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 level by 2025. It also reports on progress and based on the latest available data it is estimated that there will be a reduction in emissions of around 33% in 2025.

The Action Plan has been shared with the Committee on Climate Change for its consideration and it has been used to inform the Northern Ireland section of the 3rd Progress Report to Parliament

[<http://www.theccc.org.uk/reports/3rd-progress-report>] – this is the Committee's annual report to UK Parliament on the progress made in reducing emissions as required under the Climate Change Act (2008).

In the light of the progress made I have asked the Committee to consider if Northern Ireland should have specific target based legislation. I believe that Northern Ireland should have such legislation and that we should be setting more ambitious targets and strategies than currently the case.

Maine River System

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the Maine River system, to detail for each of the last five years (i) the number of illegal discharges; (ii) the number of successful prosecutions for illegal discharge and pollution offences; (iii) the total fines imposed and the total compensation orders; (iv) the number of consents under the Water Act 2003; and (v) the estimated cost of fish kills and pollution damage.

(AQW 1301/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) During the last five calendar years, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has recorded 118 polluting discharges in the Maine River Catchment.

Year	Severity			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
2006	0	9	17	26
2007	0	4	29	33

Year	Severity			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
2008	0	4	14	18
2009	0	3	21	24
2010	0	4	13	17
				118

- (ii) During this period three pollution incidents within the Maine River catchment have resulted in successful prosecutions. One of these incidents occurred in 2008 and the other two in 2009. A further four prosecution cases are pending but have not yet been progressed to court.
- (iii) For the 3 incidents which have resulted in prosecutions, the courts imposed fines totalling £3,000.

With regard to compensation orders, NIEA does not recover costs through compensation orders. The Agency issues formal requests for cost recovery in the form of an invoice to the polluter. During this period for the Maine River catchment, NIEA has successfully recovered costs from polluters in 3 instances totalling £706.99. Cost recovery is ongoing, but not yet complete, in a further 7 cases.

- (iv) The Water Act 2003 relates to England and Wales. The relevant Northern Ireland legislation under which consents are issued is the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

The Table below sets out the number of discharge consents issued under the Water Order since 2006 in the Maine River catchment.

Year	Number of Consents Issued
2006	4
2007	14
2008	15
2009	0
2010	1

- (v) The Department does not hold a record of the costs for habitat improvement or restocking costs following a fish kill, as these costs are normally recovered by the fishery owner. It is more common for work to be undertaken to improve the habitat for fish rather than restock with farmed fish which will dilute the genetic integrity of the native fish population. However, some fishery owners will farm wild fish for restocking purposes.

The figures confirm a large number of discharges, few prosecutions, limited recovery of costs and limited evidence of consequential costs and impact. I am to meet officials to interrogate the evidence and consider how to move forward.

Taxi Enforcement Division

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment how many inspections the Taxi Enforcement Division has carried out in the North West region in each of the last four years; and whether his Department intends to establish a Taxi Enforcement office in the North West Region.

(AQW 1354/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of inspections and operations undertaken in the North West region in the past four years is as follows:

Period	Number of Inspections	Number of Operations
1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008	163	25
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	139	14
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	252	24
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	383	67

The North West has the second highest volume of licensed taxis in Northern Ireland, and for that reason the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) intends to establish an enforcement team in the North West region. I have made it clear that this is a matter of urgency.

I am advised that the Agency has endeavoured to identify suitable premises in the North West region, taking into account business needs, logistics, and the security of its staff but to date it has not been successful. I have instructed my officials to pursue accommodation options in the area more vigorously and to report back to me quickly.

Illegal Discharges in Rivers

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of illegal discharges in (a) the Upper Bann River; and (b) Lough Neagh in each of the last five years; (ii) where and when each discharge occurred; (iii) whether any prosecutions ensued; (iv) the estimated cost in each instance of pollution and fish kills; and (v) the fines imposed and compensation awarded as a result of each discharge.

(AQW 1357/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(a) Upper Bann River

(ii) From the January 2006 to December 2010 Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) recorded 212 polluting discharges in the Upper Bann River. A breakdown of these incidents is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1: POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN UPPER BANN RIVER 2006 - 2010

Year	Severity			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
2006	0	13	22	35
2007	1	2	43	46
2008	1	11	34	46
2009	0	10	19	29
2010	0	16	40	56
				212

- (iii) The dates and locations of the water pollution incidents on the Upper Bann River, summarised above, are listed at Appendix 1.
- (iv) From January 2006 to December 2010, 54 high or medium severity pollution incidents occurred in the Upper Bann. 17 incidents have resulted in prosecution files being forwarded to the Public Prosecution Service. Of these cases, 12 have been heard in court, resulting in 11 convictions and 1 case was dismissed. A further 5 prosecution cases are pending. In other cases warning letters were issued to the polluter, no polluter was identified or farmers have been penalised through cross-compliance financial penalties.

- (iv) NIEA does not hold a record of the costs for habitat improvement or restocking costs following a fish kill, as these costs are normally recovered by the fishery owner. It is more common for work to be undertaken to improve the habitat for fish rather than restock with farmed fish which will dilute the genetic integrity of the native fish population. However, some fishery owners will farm wild fish for restocking purposes.
- (v) The courts have imposed fines totalling £16,500 for 12 incidents in the Upper Bann River. Details of the 12 incidents and the penalties imposed are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2: PENALTIES FOR POLLUTERS IN THE UPPER BANN RIVER 2006-2010

Year of incident	Incident details	Court outcome	Penalty
2006	Industrial discharge at Seagoe, Portadown	Conviction	£500
2006	Industrial discharge	Conviction	£3,000
2006	Farm effluent, Tandragee	Conviction	£2,000
2006	Farm effluent, Tandragee	Conviction	£600
2006	Industrial discharge, Banbridge	Conviction	£7,000
2007	Farm effluent, Portadown	Conviction	Bound over for 2 years
2008	Farm effluent	Conviction	Conditional discharge
2008	Silt, Banbridge	Case dismissed	N/A
2009	Sewage discharge, Ballynacor	Conviction	£750
2009	Domestic sewage	Conviction	£750
2009	Farm effluent, Portadown	Conviction	£700
2009	Industrial discharge, Tandragee	Conviction	£750

NIEA does not recover costs through compensation orders. Since April 2008, in the case of high and medium severity water pollution incidents, where the polluter can be identified, NIEA issues invoices to polluters to recover costs incurred as a result of the pollution incident.

Of the 35 high and medium severity pollution instances since April 2008, in the Upper Bann River, NIEA recovered costs from polluters in 15 instances, totalling £3,702.10. Cost recovery is still pending for the 5 outstanding prosecution cases.

(b) Lough Neagh

Lough Neagh drains approximately half of the land area of Northern Ireland and part of the Republic of Ireland. A distance of 500m from Lough Neagh was used to provide information on Lough Neagh and its immediate surrounding area.

- (i) From the January 2006 to December 2010 NIEA recorded 28 polluting discharges in or within 500 metres of Lough Neagh.

A breakdown of pollution incidents is provided in Table 3.

TABLE 3: POLLUTION INCIDENTS - LOUGH NEAGH 2006 - 2010

Year	Severity			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
2006	0	0	7	7
2007	4	0	4	8
2008	0	0	3	3
2009	0	2	3	5
2010	0	0	5	5
				28

- (ii) The dates and locations of the water pollution incidents in Lough Neagh, summarised above, are listed at Appendix 2.
- (iii) In the period January 2006 to December 2010, a prosecution case was taken for one pollution incident in Lough Neagh. In other cases warning letters were issued, no polluter was identified or farmers have been penalised through cross-compliance financial penalties.
- (iv) As stated in (a) (iv) above, NIEA does not hold a record of the costs for habitat improvement or restocking costs following a fish kill, as these costs are normally recovered by the fishery owner. It is more common for work to be undertaken to improve the habitat for fish rather than restock with farmed fish which will dilute the genetic integrity of the native fish population. However, some fishery owners will farm wild fish for restocking purposes.
- (v) Table 4 gives details of the prosecution case referred to above. NIEA has not recovered any other costs in the Lough Neagh area in this period.

TABLE 4: PENALTIES FOR POLLUTERS IN LOUGH NEAGH 2006-2010

Year of incident	Incident details	Court outcome	Penalty
2007	Industrial oil discharge near Toome	Conviction	£5,000

APPENDIX 1**DETAILS OF WATER POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN THE UPPER BANN RIVER CATCHMENT 2006 - 2010:**

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Lisbane Road Scarva	2006-01-10 09:15	Low
Carncourt Portadown	2006-01-11 15:00	Low
Scarva	2006-01-23 14:33	Low
Bocombre Avenue, Portadown	2006-01-25 10:45	Low
Tarsan Lane Portadown	2006-01-27 15:00	Medium
Portadown	2006-02-06 11:12	Low
Banbridge	2006-02-10 12:00	Low
Scarva	2006-03-02 15:30	Low
Clanbrassil Drive	2006-03-04 09:22	Medium
Northway, Portadown	2006-03-14 15:39	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Portadown	2006-03-30 14:55	Low
Kilcoo	2006-04-01 22:30	Low
Carncourt Road Portadown	2006-04-04 11:30	Medium
Clanbrassil Drive Portadown	2006-04-21 15:00	Medium
Garvaghy Road Portadown	2006-04-24 06:32	Medium
Derryvore Lane Seagoe Portadown	2006-05-04 11:00	Medium
Mullalelish Road	2006-05-05 12:00	Medium
Kilcoo	2006-05-06 13:40	Low
Clanbrassil Drive, Portadown	2006-05-10 14:05	Medium
Weavers Meadow, Banbridge	2006-06-01 19:02	Low
Mullavilly Road, Laurelvilla	2006-06-07 09:41	Medium
Barrack Hill Lawrencetown	2006-07-27 14:00	Low
Portadown	2006-09-01 14:30	Low
Kilcoo	2006-09-11 16:30	Low
Muddock River Kilcoo	2006-09-12 14:05	Low
Tandragee	2006-09-14 14:26	Medium
Hilltown	2006-10-27 14:10	Low
Leode Rd Hilltown	2006-11-04 12:55	Low
Banbridge	2006-11-15 14:45	Medium
Corbet Lake	2006-11-28 10:45	Medium
Hunters Hill Road, Gilford	2006-12-04 17:00	Low
Portadown	2006-12-07 09:30	Low
Laundered Waste Dumped	2006-12-23 09:40	Medium
Shillingingtons Quay Portadown	2006-12-27 09:30	Low
Portadown	2006-12-29 14:15	Low
Scarva	2007-01-05 09:30	Low
Levaghery Portadown	2007-01-08 10:00	Low
Killicomaine Portadown	2007-01-30 10:00	Low
Richill	2007-02-02 12:00	Low
Portadown	2007-02-09 10:00	Low
Ballyrone Road Rathfriland	2007-02-16 17:00	Low
Annagh	2007-02-21 12:00	Low
Hilltown	2007-02-23 10:45	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Gilford/Tandragee	2007-02-23 11:45	Low
Ballygorian Road Hilltown	2007-02-23 12:30	Low
Tandragee Road Scarva	2007-02-27 11:30	Low
Hilton Park Portadown	2007-03-05 09:15	Low
New Bridge Portadown	2007-03-12 09:00	Low
Lurgan Road Banbridge	2007-03-22 09:50	Low
Tandragee	2007-03-27 12:15	Low
Aughlish Rd, Tandragee	2007-03-27 12:20	Low
Portadown	2007-03-28 10:30	Low
Ballybreagh Road, Portadown	2007-05-02 16:00	Low
Lawrencetown Banbridge	2007-05-18 11:00	Low
Seagoe	2007-05-18 13:34	Low
Banbridge	2007-05-20 10:45	Low
Portadown	2007-05-27 16:06	Low
Hilton Park Portadown	2007-06-11 09:15	Low
Hunters Hill Road Gilford	2007-06-11 21:02	Low
Cavan Road Rathfriland	2007-06-28 14:25	Low
Ballynacarrick Road, Portadown	2007-08-06 13:00	Low
Gilford	2007-08-10 17:00	Low
Tandragee	2007-08-16 11:30	Low
Portadown	2007-08-28 18:48	Low
Portadown	2007-09-03 18:45	Low
Seagoe Wwtw	2007-09-07 10:00	Low
Banbridge	2007-09-20 14:00	Low
Portadown	2007-09-21 11:00	Medium
Castlevern Road Katesbridge	2007-09-24 12:15	Low
Marlaco Road Portadown	2007-09-24 12:45	Low
Portadown	2007-09-26 09:45	High
Gilford	2007-09-26 11:50	Low
Crowhill Road	2007-09-29 13:52	Low
Portadown	2007-10-03 09:05	Low
Bleary Portadown	2007-10-03 14:00	Low
Tandragee Road	2007-10-22 16:00	Medium

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Marlaco Road,Portadown	2007-10-25 13:50	Low
Bleary Portadown	2007-10-30 11:00	Low
Hamiltownsawn	2007-11-08 10:30	Low
Moss Road Gilford	2007-11-15 10:00	Low
Brackagh Drain,Portadown	2007-11-21 16:00	Low
Drumnascamph Road Rathfriland	2008-01-03 11:45	Medium
Bridge Street,Banbridge	2008-01-17 10:45	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-17 11:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-17 13:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-17 14:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-18 11:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-18 14:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-01-18 15:00	Low
Pinley Crescent, Banbridge	2008-02-06 10:00	Low
Drain Laws Lane Banbridge	2008-02-07 10:00	Low
Hamiltonsbawn	2008-02-22 11:00	Low
Ballybreagh Road Aghorey	2008-02-22 13:00	Medium
Portadown	2008-02-29 13:00	Low
Bannview Rd Banbridge	2008-03-13 13:00	Medium
Banbridge	2008-03-14 11:00	Low
Greenhill Road Katesbridge	2008-04-10 10:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-04-11 13:30	Low
Stramore Road, Gilford	2008-04-15 12:00	Low
Hilltown	2008-05-08 13:35	Low
Laws Lane Banbridge	2008-05-09 15:00	Low
Derryvore Lane, Portadown	2008-05-14 12:45	Low
Drumnacany Road	2008-05-19 15:30	Low
Portadown	2008-05-22 15:00	Low
Hilltown Wwtw	2008-05-24 12:55	Medium
Hilltown Wwtw	2008-05-25 10:15	Low
Portadown	2008-05-29 12:00	Medium
Loughgall Road Portadown	2008-05-30 15:00	Low
Mayobridge	2008-07-08 16:15	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Wwtw Banbridge	2008-08-07 11:00	Low
Hilltown	2008-08-07 14:00	Low
Derryvore Lane, Portadown	2008-08-13 09:12	Medium
Banbridge	2008-09-03 17:50	Low
Garvaghy Road, Portadown	2008-09-10 12:40	High
Portadown	2008-09-10 16:00	Low
Banbridge	2008-09-18 14:15	Low
Bryansford Road Hilltown	2008-09-23 14:00	Medium
Shanrod Road Katesbridge	2008-10-02 10:00	Low
Portadown	2008-10-07 11:20	Low
Lawrencetown Banbridge	2008-10-13 14:30	Low
Banbridge	2008-10-16 11:55	Medium
Annaclone	2008-10-31 16:00	Low
Katesbridge	2008-11-11 15:00	Medium
Drumnascamph Road Rathfriland	2008-11-18 16:15	Low
Tamary Road Mayobridge	2008-11-19 11:30	Medium
Greenhill Rd, Katesbridge	2008-11-20 10:50	Medium
Ballyrone Road Rathfriland	2008-12-03 12:00	Low
Katesbridge Road, Banbridge	2009-01-05 16:18	Low
Seagoe	2009-01-07 12:40	Medium
Tandragee	2009-01-14 14:00	Low
Ballyward	2009-02-27 16:22	Low
Banbridge	2009-03-02 11:50	Low
Eden Avenue, Portadown	2009-03-10 09:53	Medium
Portadown	2009-03-10 11:00	Low
Shillingtons Bridge, Portadown	2009-03-13 13:30	Medium
Old Bleach Green Banbridge	2009-03-19 14:00	Low
Portadown	2009-03-31 08:55	Medium
Portadown	2009-03-31 11:30	Low
Portadown	2009-03-31 12:00	Low
Sewage Discharge Orchard Mews Portadown	2009-04-01 10:30	Low
Portadown	2009-04-22 12:15	Medium

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Hilltown	2009-05-01 18:35	Medium
Kilcoo	2009-05-12 11:20	Low
Gilford	2009-05-30 13:00	Low
Portadown	2009-06-26 14:05	Low
Portadown	2009-07-02 12:30	Low
Ballydrumman Rd Ballyward	2009-07-23 15:30	Low
Portadown	2009-07-29 12:00	Medium
Lawrencetown	2009-08-19 14:30	Low
Tandragee	2009-08-20 10:05	Low
Portadown	2009-08-20 17:50	Low
Lisnaree Rd Banbridge	2009-09-18 16:00	Medium
Portadown	2009-09-25 13:00	Low
Birches Portadown	2009-09-30 11:00	Low
Lawrencetown	2009-10-02 18:30	Medium
Tandragee	2009-11-17 11:40	Medium
Lough Rd Katesbridge	2010-01-26 11:00	Medium
Shanrod Road Katesbridge	2010-01-26 12:10	Medium
Eelwire Rd Moneysslane	2010-02-04 09:30	Low
Rathfriland	2010-02-10 11:25	Medium
Portadown	2010-02-11 10:00	Low
Thomas Street Portadown	2010-02-11 15:00	Low
Portadown	2010-02-12 09:00	Low
Banbridge	2010-02-12 12:30	Medium
Banbridge	2010-02-15 09:25	Medium
Dunbar Footbridge Banbridge	2010-02-16 15:00	Low
Banbridge	2010-02-16 16:30	Low
Portadown	2010-02-20 16:30	Low
Dromore Street, Banbridge	2010-03-02 17:48	Low
Banbridge	2010-03-04 09:29	Low
Portadown	2010-03-09 14:00	Medium
Craigavon	2010-03-12 12:00	Medium
Hilltown	2010-03-23 16:10	Low
Banbridge	2010-03-24 11:00	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Kilcoo	2010-03-24 13:54	Low
Banbridge	2010-03-27 12:32	Low
Lurgan Road, Banbridge	2010-04-08 15:45	Low
At Hunters Hill Road	2010-04-09 11:30	Medium
Banbridge	2010-04-15 17:03	Low
Scarva	2010-05-05 12:00	Low
Hilltown	2010-05-06 16:38	Low
Portadown	2010-05-10 11:30	Low
Banbridge	2010-05-20 18:40	Low
Banbridge	2010-05-29 18:20	Medium
Banbridge	2010-06-08 11:00	Low
Craigavon Lake	2010-06-28 12:25	Low
Tierkelly Road,Rathfriland	2010-06-30 14:38	Low
Banbridge	2010-07-08 09:23	Medium
Clanbrassil Drive Portadown	2010-07-09 14:30	Medium
Ballydown Meadows Banbridge	2010-07-26 14:00	Low
Craigavon	2010-08-02 15:10	Medium
Banbridge	2010-09-03 13:00	Low
Banbridge	2010-09-14 12:00	Low
Ballynagarrick	2010-09-29 12:00	Low
Banbridge	2010-09-29 15:00	Low
Banbridge	2010-10-01 09:00	Low
Portadown	2010-10-04 20:22	Low
Shanrod Road Katersbridge	2010-10-11 15:45	Low
Ballela Rd Katesbridge	2010-10-12 11:00	Medium
Ballyroney Banbridge	2010-10-12 14:00	Low
Kinallen Road, Ballyward	2010-10-12 15:40	Medium
Portadown	2010-10-18 17:00	Low
Portadown	2010-10-25 12:25	Low
Gilford Road Portadown	2010-11-03 13:00	Low
Seagoe	2010-11-10 10:00	Low
Gilford	2010-11-15 10:00	Low
Portadown	2010-11-19 12:00	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Katesbridge	2010-12-10 11:00	Low
Katesbridge	2010-12-10 12:30	Low
Lough Rd Katesbridge	2010-12-14 12:00	Medium
Katesbridge	2010-12-14 13:00	Low
Katesbridge	2010-12-14 14:00	Medium

APPENDIX 2**DETAILS OF WATER POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN THE LOUGH NEAGH CATCHMENT:**

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Crumlin	2006-02-15 10:30	Low
Deerpark Road, Toomebridge	2006-03-08 13:54	Low
Lough Beg	2006-04-15 12:22	Low
Loughview Road, Crumlin	2006-05-09 15:00	Low
Oxford Island	2006-08-25 14:20	Low
Randalstown Road Antrim	2006-10-10 14:20	Low
Main Street Ballyronan	2006-12-24 12:32	Low
Woodville River/Kinnegoe Bay	2007-01-12 10:33	High
Kinnegoe Bay	2007-01-12 11:15	High
Dublin Road Antrim	2007-03-13 11:35	Low
Loughview Road, Antrim	2007-03-16 09:30	Low
Derryclone Road Gawleys Gate	2007-04-20 16:00	Low
Lough Beg Toomebridge	2007-04-21 14:54	High
Deerpark Road, Toome	2007-04-22 18:00	High
Church Road Ardmore	2007-06-11 10:00	Low
Waterfoot Road	2008-01-17 15:45	Low
Loughview Road, Aldergrove	2008-03-10 10:20	Low
Castledawson	2008-05-24 21:36	Low
The Steeple Burn, Antrim	2009-06-13 13:24	Low
Annaghmore Road, Coagh	2009-06-14 11:48	Medium
Bay Road Crumlin	2009-07-07 14:40	Medium
Antrim	2009-08-11 16:50	Low
Ardboe Road, Mooretown	2009-10-15 15:15	Low

Location	Date and time incident was reported to or discovered by NIEA	Severity
Shanes Castle Estate, Antrim	2010-02-19 15:09	Low
Castledawson	2010-06-17 13:42	Low
Loughview Road, Crumlin	2010-08-16 15:00	Low
Lurgan	2010-11-10 11:35	Low
Loughview Road, Crumlin	2010-11-17 14:00	Low

Closet River in Lurgan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of illegal discharges; and (ii) the number of dead animal carcasses in the Closet River in Lurgan in each of the last five years; (iii) where and when each discharge or dumping occurred; (iv) whether any prosecutions ensued; (v) the estimated cost in each instance of pollution and fish kills; and (vi) the fines imposed and compensation awarded as a result of each discharge or dumping.

(AQW 1358/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) From the January 2006 to December 2010 NIEA recorded 31 polluting discharges in the Closet River.

TABLE 1: POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN THE CLOSET RIVER IN 2006-2010

Year	Severity			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
2006	0	2	2	4
2007	0	4	7	11
2008	0	1	5	6
2009	0	1	4	5
2010	0	3	2	5
				31

- (ii) Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is only responsible for removing fallen animals if they are causing pollution. During the period January 2006 to December 2010 Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has no record of any reports of fallen animals in the Closet River catchment.
- (iii) The dates and locations of the water pollution incidents are summarised in Appendix 1.
- (iv) Within the period January 2006 to December 2010, two cases relating to pollution incidents in the Closet River were passed to Public Prosecution Service for consideration as to whether or not an offence has been committed. These have not been heard in court yet.
- (v) NIEA does not hold a record of the costs for habitat improvement or restocking costs following a fish kill, as these costs are normally recovered by the fishery owner. It is more common for work to be undertaken to improve the habitat for fish rather than restock with farmed fish which will dilute the genetic integrity of the native fish population. However, some fishery owners will farm wild fish for restocking purposes.

- (vi) NIEA does not recover costs through compensation orders. Since April 2008, NIEA policy is that for high and medium severity pollution incidents, where the polluter can be identified, costs incurred by NIEA are recovered from the polluter.

There have been no fines to date. NIEA has, to date, successfully recovered costs totalling £731.43 from polluters in two cases. In the two cases where prosecution is still pending, cost recovery will be completed upon a successful conviction.

The figures confirm a large number of discharges, few prosecutions, limited recovery of costs and limited evidence of consequential costs and impact. I am to meet officials to interrogate the evidence and consider how to move forward.

DETAILS OF LOCATION AND TIME OF POLLUTION INCIDENTS IN CLOSET RIVER

Location	Date	Incident Severity
Bleary Road, Portadown	25 April 2006	Low
Tandragee Road	21 June 2006	Low
Ballynacor	22 September 2006	Medium
Ballynacor	28 December 2006	Medium
Cranny Road	01 January 2007	Low
Tandragee Road	14 March 2007	Low
Sugar Island Road	02 April 2007	Medium
Sugarisland Road	03 May 2007	Low
Sugar Island Road	03 May 2007	Medium
Glenavon Lane	26 June 2007	Low
Kilvergan Road	24 July 2007	Low
Dukestown Lane	29 August 2007	Low
Craigavon Golf Course	29 October 2007	Medium
Ballynacor Road	30 October 2007	Low
Ballynacor Road	07 November 2007	Medium
Ballynacor Road	11 January 2008	Low
Silverwood	06 March 2008	Low
Carn Industrial Estate Portadown	20 June 2008	Low
Craigavon	18 July 2008	Low
Closet River	12 August 2008	Medium
Lurgan	16 August 2008	Low
O'Connell Lane	05 February 2009	Low
Kilvergan Road	04 June 2009	Medium
Silverwood	25 June 2009	Low
Silverwood	27 November 2009	Low
Silverwood	04 December 2009	Low

Location	Date	Incident Severity
Wenlock Road	22 April 2010	Medium
Drumnagoon Road	12 June 2010	Low
Ballydugan	24 June 2010	Medium
Closet Tributary	18 August 2010	Low
Brownlow	10 December 2010	Medium

Capital Projects for North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1383/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the North Down constituency area there are currently no specific capital projects planned by my Department over the next three years. The entire DOE capital budget 2012-13-14-15 is £5.9, £4.0 and £7.6 million respectively. However, there will be opportunities for projects to be funded under the Rethink Waste Fund.

Planning Applications for Wind Turbines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for wind turbines in each constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1394/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Due to the way in which applications for wind turbines are recorded, the figures provided below also include other renewable energy applications such as solar panels and hydroelectric schemes. In order to identify single wind turbines only a manual search of the large number of records returned would be required.

The number of planning applications for wind turbines or other renewable applications in each constituency in each of the last five years is as follows:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast East	0	2	0	0	0
Belfast North	1	0	1	0	0
Belfast South	1	2	2	2	0
Belfast West	0	1	3	2	2
East Antrim	5	5	14	11	27
East Londonderry	10	16	19	14	57
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9	10	25	12	24
Foyle	3	1	5	6	24
Lagan Valley	11	8	20	8	16
Mid Ulster	16	12	13	24	48
Newry and Armagh	18	22	36	13	45
North Antrim	14	14	24	23	78

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
North Down	2	2	1	6	5
South Antrim	9	13	15	13	18
South Down	25	31	48	19	31
Strangford	7	9	18	6	6
Upper Bann	0	8	9	7	8
West Tyrone	13	19	27	38	48
Total	144	175	280	204	437

Source: Planning NI, DOE

Planning Applications for a Wind Turbine

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average length of time it takes to reach a final decision on a planning application for a wind turbine.

(AQW 1395/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A total of 51 planning applications for single wind turbines were decided upon in the 2010 / 2011 business year. The median length of time it took to reach a decision on planning applications for wind turbines in the 2010/2011 business year was 120 working days or 24 weeks. The median is a measure of central tendency, with the processing time on planning applications determined in this business year ranging from 37 days to 437 days.

Re-Gen Waste

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for an update on Re-Gen Waste's plans for a material recovery facility in Portadown; and (ii) for his assessment of the concerns raised by Almac Pharmaceuticals in relation to this matter.

(AQW 1406/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) Re-Gen Waste Ltd. submitted a planning application on 24 August 2007 to develop a waste management facility at Unit 14 Seagoe Industrial Estate, Craigavon. Following consideration of the application and the objection issues, the Department refused planning permission on 16 January 2009 on the basis that it the proposal would be incompatible with the surrounding/ adjacent pharmaceutical use and therefore contrary to Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) General Principles and Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) Planning and Economic Development. The grounds of refusal also included the failure of Re-Gen Waste Ltd to demonstrate compliance with Policy WM1 of Planning Policy Statement 11 (PPS11) Planning and Waste Management and Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) Access, Movement and Parking.

Re-Gen Waste Ltd has appealed the refusal of permission to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC). The appeal commenced on 10 May 2011 but was subsequently adjourned. The reconvened appeal hearing is scheduled to take place on 20 and 21 July 2011.

- (ii) Given the Department's decision in this case and the existence of an on-going appeal process it is not appropriate for me to make further comment on the concerns raised by Almac Pharmaceuticals.

Planning Permission

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how many homes have been built in the South Armagh area without planning permission; and what action his Department is taking to address this matter.

(AQW 1414/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have been advised that the Department is currently investigating in the order of 40 cases of alleged breaches of planning control related to the unauthorised construction of homes throughout Armagh City and District and that portion of County Armagh that falls within the Newry and Mourne Council Area. It may be that a number of other cases exist which have not been brought to the attention of the Department.

I am unable to provide specific details on individual cases to avoid prejudice to ongoing investigations. However, I have had sight of and considered the schedule of cases. I can say, however, that these cases include the alleged unauthorised storage of mobile homes and their use for residential purposes, the alleged unauthorised change of use of single dwellings to apartments, the alleged construction of unauthorised dwellings not in accordance with previous approved plans and the construction of dwellings without the benefit of planning permission.

The Department has an enforcement procedure in place and will investigate any reports of such alleged breach of planning control. Where appropriate, formal enforcement action will be initiated. I am to meet with officials to assess if all that should be done is being done and in good time.

Planning Service: Neighbour Notification

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment, for each of the last five years, to detail on how many occasions the Planning Service did not issue a neighbour notification when it should have, broken down by each divisional planning office.

(AQW 1486/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Neighbour Notification scheme is not a statutory requirement but has become established practice and custom for decades. In the last 5 years, some 729,481 neighbour notification letters issued in respect of 92,378 planning applications.

The Department has no formal method of recording where neighbour notification letters have not issued, however, where such a failing is drawn to our attention by the Ombudsman, a record is kept. From this source, in the last 5 years, failure to issue such letters has been recorded on 8 occasions though none has been recorded in the last 3. Five of these were in the Downpatrick Office, 2 in the Northern Office and one in Craigavon. The attached table at Annex 1 details for each of the last 5 years the number of neighbour notification letters issued by each Area Planning Office on receipt of planning applications.

Planning Division	10/11		09/10	
	No. of Apps	No. of Notifications	No. of Apps	No. of Notifications
Belfast Area	3576	33777	4146	34741
Northern Area - Coleraine	1230	7472	1545	9318
Northern Area - Londonderry	815	6504	979	5588
South Antrim Area	1881	14707	2258	17903
Southern Area - Craigavon	2673	17812	3266	23539
Southern Area - Downpatrick	771	5025	874	6351
Strategic Planning Division	243	4588	217	5646
Western Area - Enniskillen	532	2106	752	2959
Western Area - Omagh	1892	9476	2379	12361
Total	13613	101467	16416	118406

Planning Division	10/11		07/08		06/07	
	No. of Apps	No. of Notifications	No. of Apps	No. of Notifications	No. of Apps	No. of Notifications
Belfast Area	3576	33777	6326	59668	6053	56076
Northern Area - Coleraine	1230	7472	2168	13902	1963	11832
Northern Area - Londonderry	815	6504	1480	12021	1575	13707
South Antrim Area	1881	14707	3253	33142	3002	28236
Southern Area - Craigavon	2673	17812	3792	31008	4237	33585
Southern Area - Downpatrick	771	5025	1053	10267	1037	7914
Strategic Planning Division	243	4588	151	3019	187	2967
Western Area - Enniskillen	532	2106	1019	4765	951	4184
Western Area - Omagh	1892	9476	3704	22726	3484	21029
Total	13613	101467	22946	190518	22489	179530

Green Belt Area in the Towerview Area of North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on safeguarding the green belt area in the Towerview area of North Down.

(AQW 1506/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', published on 1 June 2010 sets out planning policies for development in the countryside. Countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as defined in development plans.

The area of countryside adjacent to the Towerview area of Bangor was proposed as green belt under Designation COU 1 of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP). However, the policy provisions of PPS21 now take precedence over any green belt designations contained in existing and published draft development plans, and as a consequence the Department has withdrawn the proposed BMA Green Belt contained in Draft BMAP.

Draft BMAP was published in November 2004, and it covers 6 District Council areas including North Down. Nearly 4,000 objections were received in respect of the Draft Plan and a public inquiry was convened by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to consider these objections. This inquiry commenced in April 2007 and finished in May 2008.

A number of representations were received that related to the settlement limit for Bangor, including the part of the limit adjacent to the Towerview area. These objections relate to the non-inclusion of land within the settlement limit.

The Department is still awaiting the substantive part of the PAC Report on the objections heard at the BMAP Public Inquiry, and when this report is received in its entirety, it will be possible to further progress the work that will lead to the adoption of BMAP. At that stage the final position regarding the objections to the Bangor settlement limit will be made public. It is anticipated that the Plan will be adopted in 2012.

Car Insurance Premiums for Young Drivers

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has considered introducing a policy to encourage young people to participate in yearly road safety workshops or the Pass Plus course with the aim of reducing car insurance premiums for young drivers.

(AQW 1512/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department, with its road safety partners, makes provision for young people to participate in road safety education in schools and attend Road Safe Road shows involving PSNI and NIFRS. It also works closely with the GAA and Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster to help design and deliver road safety campaigns to their members.

Pass Plus has never been made available in Northern Ireland but the Department is now working with the Department for Transport and the Driving Standards Agency to develop a successor initiative over the next two years. This is expected to take the form of a new post test qualification designed to ensure insurance market confidence by providing candidates with an improved way of developing their driving skills after passing the driving test.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants Suspended from Work

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of civil servants currently suspended from work, broken down by grade; (ii) how long they have been suspended; and (iii) the total cost in salaries, pension contributions and National Insurance since their suspensions began.

(AQW 522/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is provided in the table below. Some figures have been amalgamated rather than broken down by grade to protect the identity of individuals.

Numbers and Grades	2 Admin Assistants	3 Admin Officers	3 Technical Grade 1s	2 Staff Officers	14 Various Grades
Number of weeks suspended in total	112 weeks	71 weeks	23 weeks	19 weeks	630 weeks

Total Salary paid	£489,630*
Total National Insurance paid	£38,148*
Total Pensions Contributions paid	£97,846*

* This includes compensation paid as a result of the equal pay review.

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff are employed by the Special EU Programmes Body in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 1356/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body currently employs 56 staff: 49 Staff in Northern Ireland and 7 in the Republic of Ireland.

Finance Ministers, North and South, have agreed SEUPB can proceed on the basis of 65 staff, the complement as agreed in 2007 for the years 2011 and 2012 but that this complement will fall to a number in the 50s in 2013; and to a number in the 40s in 2014.

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has contributed to the Special EU Programmes Body in each year since 1998.

(AQW 1416/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is one of six North/South Implementation Bodies established on 2 December 1999. Since its establishment DFP has paid SEUPB the following amounts of administrative grant:

Financial Year	Total Payments
2000-2001	£550,129
2001-2002	£1,262,030
2002-2003	£750,278
2003-2004	£864,690
2004-2005	£1,077,915
2005-2006	£1,098,251
2006-2007	£1,069,250
2007-2008	£1,126,500
2008-2009	£1,129,750
2009-2010	£1,376,947
2010-2011	£1,102,000
2011-2012	£265,375 (Apr–Jun '11)

Minimum cash releasing efficiency savings of 3% per year are required of all north/south Bodies for the period 2011 to 2013. This will apply to SEUPB.

Special EU Programmes Body: Bureaucracy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what his Department is doing to reduce the bureaucracy associated with the Special EU Programmes Body.

(AQW 1446/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a cross border body which aims to maximise the drawdown of EU funds under the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes.

The allocation and administration of these and all other EU programmes are strictly controlled by the European Commission through a series of regulations and guidance notes, which establish a wide range of implementation and audit requirements. These have a direct bearing on the processes and procedures that have to be undertaken to ensure compliance and avoid interruptions or suspension or the imposition of financial penalties. This is not always understood by project partners who may feel dissatisfied with the time taken to process claims and reimburse payments and wrongly regard the procedures as mere box ticking.

My Department and the Republic's Department of Finance, act as sponsor Departments for the Body and, in partnership with SEUPB, strive to deliver value for money and continuous improvement in programme delivery, applying the minimum amount of resources required to support the core business, commensurate with maximising the drawdown of funding for the benefit Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland.

The previous PEACE and INTERREG programmes were delivered by more than sixty intermediary bodies. However, delivery of the current programmes is largely carried out by SEUPB itself. An independent staffing review estimated that the introduction of this centralised delivery system would simplify implementation and save approximately £9 million in administration costs. It was on this basis that DFP approved the centralised delivery arrangements.

A new round of EU funding is due to begin in 2014. In preparation for this round, DFP will critically review the administration of the current programmes with a view to identifying ways in which this might be improved going forward. Furthermore, it has been agreed that DFP's Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) and DPE&R's (ROI) Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit will shortly be supporting SEUPB to identify any potential efficiencies in the current SEUPB administrative processes. This will also support SEUPB in reducing their staffing complement from its current peak of 65 staff to a figure in the forties by 2014.

Civil Service Employees

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 6743/10, for an update on the progress made in monitoring the political opinion, marital status, sexual orientation and dependants status of Civil Service employees.

(AQW 1465/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Progress has been made in developing the new monitoring systems to collect data on all equality groups identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Data is currently being collected from applicants for posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Work is still on-going to finalise the system that will be used to collect and hold monitoring data for current employees.

Devolution of Corporation Tax Rating Powers

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what work his Department is doing in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the devolution of corporation tax rating powers.

(AQW 1473/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Ministers and officials from my Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have been working closely on this issue for some time now.

In particular, this work involved scrutinising and liaising with Treasury counterparts on the analysis contained within the Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy consultation document prior to its publication in March 2011. More recently, Northern Ireland Ministers also participated in two consultation events, one in London on 8th June 2011, and one in Belfast on 7th July 2011, where they sought the views of key stakeholders on the devolution of corporation tax.

The consultation closed on 8th July 2011 and Northern Ireland Ministers and officials will need to carefully examine any proposal to devolve corporation tax following an analysis of responses. Detailed discussions will also have to take place with Treasury in relation to costs and implementation issues in particular.

Green New Deal

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has for the £4m allocated in the budget for the Green New Deal; and which Department will lead in taking the programme forward.

(AQW 1531/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department for Social Development is the lead department in taking forward the Green New Deal proposals, and I understand a business case is currently being prepared to inform the future direction of the initiative. The business case has not yet been received by my Department.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Family Planning Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how much money his Department, either directly or indirectly has provided to the Family Planning Association in each of the last five years; and (ii) to detail all pro-life groups which have received funding from his Department in each of the last five years and the amount they received.

(AQW 1547/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):

- (i) My Department has provided funding to the Family Planning Association (NI) in each of the last five years as follows:

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£89,188	£91,418	£136,667	£153,723	£137,630

In addition, I am advised that funding provided from the HSC sector to the Family Planning Association (NI) for the same period is as follows:

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10 ¹	2010/11
£16,506	£29,208	£25,859	£317,886	£384,320

¹ Note: Funding provided by the Public Health Agency to FPA(NI) is included from 09/10 onwards; funding to the FPA(NI) from the Health Promotion Agency prior to April 2009 is not included in the above table as this is not available.

- (ii) My Department has provided funding to one pro-life group, Life(NI), in each of the last five years as follows:

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£25,644	£26,285	£30,442	£27,615	£27,615

Department of Justice

Wrongly Released Prisoners

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the lessons learned and the changes implemented as a result of the incidents of wrongly released prisoners prior to the erroneous release of George Damien McFerran.

(AQW 1376/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Prior to the erroneous release of George Damien Patrick McFerran three other prisoners, Devidas Paliutis, Connelly James Cummins and Sean Gerard Cahill were released in error. The circumstances of these releases differed from each other and from that of Mr. McFerran. None of the recommendations in the Paliutis and Cummins cases would have prevented the release of Mr. Cahill.

The lessons learned from each incident were covered in the recommendations of the respective investigation reports.

Legal Aid for Riot Related Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 795/11-15 (i) how many people prosecuted and convicted for offences which occurred in Belfast during the 12th July period 2010 have been granted Legal Aid and the cost to date; and (ii) what are the circumstances of the summonses being issued/re-issued for six people.

(AQW 1404/11-15)

Mr Ford: 38 of the 39 people prosecuted and convicted have been granted Legal Aid.

The total Legal Aid cost to date is £53,053.62.

In relation to the six summonses, they are being re-issued as they could not be served for several reasons including difficulties in locating the subject and the subject not responding to the door at the correct address.

Department for Regional Development

Pay and Display Machines

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development, for each constituency, to detail (i) the number of pay and display parking machines; (ii) how many machines have been out of order during the last 12 months; (iii) for how long, on average, the machines have been out of order; and (iv) the cost of (a) repairs to the out of order machines; and (b) maintenance of the machines during the last 12 months.

(AQW 824/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised that information in relation to Pay and Display machines is held on a town rather than constituency basis. Details of the number of machines in each town and the number of machines with faults recorded from May 2010 to April 2011 are detailed in the table below:

Location	No. of Pay & Display Machines	No. of machines having faults - May 2010 to April 2011 (inclusive)
Antrim	3	3
Armagh	3	2
Ballyclare	5	5
Ballymena	10	10
Ballymoney	6	6
Ballynahinch	5	5
Banbridge	6	6
Bangor	12	10
Belfast	181	35
Carrickfergus	11	11
Coleraine	9	9
Downpatrick	2	2
Dungannon	8	8
Enniskillen	18	18

Location	No. of Pay & Display Machines	No. of machines having faults - May 2010 to April 2011 (inclusive)
Hillsborough	1	1
Holywood	6	6
Larne	9	8
Limavady	6	6
Lisburn	51	31
Londonderry	13	12
Magherafelt	7	7
Newry	73	38
Newtownards	11	7
Omagh	14	14
Portadown	6	6
Strabane	6	6
Total	482	272

Roads Service's has contracted NSL, its contractor for parking and enforcement arrangements, to manage Pay and Display machines on its behalf. Performance in this area is measured against a specific contractual Key Performance Indicator (KPI) which focuses on response times to reported faults rather than average repair times or the length of time machines are out of order.

The stipulated response time for Pay and Display machines is 24 hours. To meet the required standard, NSL must respond to 98% of reported faults within the stipulated response time. In the period May 2010 to April 2011, NSL failed to meet this KPI on two occasions, recording a 97% response on each occasion. In accordance with the conditions of contract, performance payments were reduced on each occasion by Roads Service.

The costs of repairs to out of order machines and maintenance of machines are contained within the overall contract with NSL, and is calculated on the basis of a monthly charge of £61.15 for each machine. This fixed charge includes the routine maintenance of the machine, cleaning, including the removal of any graffiti, and the replacement of any broken or worn parts.

I am concerned at the high number of machines having faults and have instructed my officials to address this issue as a matter of priority.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives since May 2007 that have received co-operation from (a) a Republic of Ireland Government Department, or its agencies; and (b) any Republic of Ireland non-governmental organisation; and (ii) the departmental schemes, projects or initiatives for which he intends to seek co-operation from these bodies.

(AQW 984/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The tables below record my Department's main schemes, projects and initiatives which have, since May 2007, received, or are planned to receive, co-operation from Government Departments, agencies and/or organisations from the Republic of Ireland.

These schemes and projects may have featured in discussions of the North South Ministerial Council in Transport Sector or Plenary formats. Following each NSMC meeting an agreed Joint Communiqué is issued and this is posted on the NSMC website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org. After each meeting, a Minister or Junior Minister who participates in a NSMC meeting is required to make a Statement to the Assembly. Details of these statements are recorded in Hansard and copies are available on the Assembly website.

CURRENT SCHEMES – MAY 2007 - DATE

Scheme/Project or Initiative	(a) ROI Gov't Dept or Agency	(b) ROI Non Gov't Agency
Spatial planning issues including preparation of a Framework for Collaboration	Dept of the Environment, Community and Local Government	International Centre for Local and Regional Development Irish Cross Border Area Network
All Island Freight Forum	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Central Statistics Office	Other partners are Road Safety Agency, Irish Maritime Development Office, Irish Exporters Association, CBI/IBEC, Freight Transport Association Ireland.
Plugged in Places Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Pilot Project		ESB, Intel Ireland.
Carshare NW car share website	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Donegal County Council, Letterkenny Chamber
Walk to School Week 2009, 2010 and 2011	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	An Taisce
Bike Week 2009, 2010 and 2011	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Multi- agency Bike Week events group
Promotion of sustainable transport and active travel	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	
Provision of Wi-Fi on Cross Border Rail Services	Capital and running costs will be shared between Translink and Iarnród Éireann.	
Installation of Safety Systems on 3 no. class 201 locomotives	Capital costs shared between Translink and Iarnród Éireann.	
Enterprise Generator Van modifications (Head End Power mod)	Cooperation between Translink and Iarnród Éireann on planned/agreed activities and cost share.	
Enterprise Phase 2 Overhaul	Cooperation between Translink and Iarnród Éireann on planned/ agreed activities and cost share.	

Scheme/Project or Initiative	(a) ROI Gov't Dept or Agency	(b) ROI Non Gov't Agency
Smaller capital projects including Ride Comfort Modifications, Toilet and Vestibule Doors Control Unit	Cooperation between Translink and Iarnród Éireann on planned/agreed activities and cost share.	
Funding for Runway Improvements at City of Derry Airport	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	
Small Ferries Project	Department of Arts Heritage and Gaeltacht	
Continuation of Magilligan to Greencastle Ferry Service	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Donegal County Council
Enhancing the work of the Carlingford Lough Commissioners	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; Maritime Safety Directorate	
Ports policy and operational issues	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Irish Maritime Development Office Irish Ports Association (Dun Laoghaire; Dundalk, Drogheda; Shannon-Foyne ports) Commissioner for Irish Lights
Cross Border Rural Community Transport Exercise	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	Pobal
Golden Trekker Scheme		Irish Rail Tourism Ireland
All Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme	Department of Social Protection	
Railway Safety Policy and operational development	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Irish Rail Safety Commission	Iarnrod Eireann
Railway Regulation policy and operational development	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Irish Rail Safety Commission	Iarnrod Eireann
EU Cross Acceptance policy and operational development	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Irish Rail Safety Commission	Iarnrod Eireann
Public Transport Reform Policy Development	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and National Transport Authority	

Scheme/Project or Initiative	(a) ROI Gov't Dept or Agency	(b) ROI Non Gov't Agency
EASYWAY – European wide transport project involving Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) on the Trans European Network (TENS) Part funded EU (27 member states involved).	National Roads Authority	
5 Nations meeting on Intelligent transport Systems (ITS). Home Nations and ROI.	National Roads Authority	
A1 N1 Newry to Dundalk dual carriageway.	National Roads Authority	Louth County Council
Narrow Water Bridge – Co-operation only, no direct involvement and funded entirely by Louth County Council		Louth County Council
Cross Border Steering Group	Comprises senior representatives of Roads Service, the National Roads Authority and The Irish Department of Transport which meets biannually to discuss roads related issues.	
Roads Service is the lead partner, in a Cross Border Roads and Infrastructure Development (CBRIDs) project to avail of funding through the Interreg IVa programme.		This CBRIDs project is a joint venture between Roads Service and Monaghan County Council, to benefit from grant aid for Capital projects in the border region. Monaghan have re-constructed two cross border bridges that were demolished in the 1970's and Roads Service has invested in the Culmore Road / Madams Bank Road junction improvement in Londonderry.
N13 Stranorlar – Derry Transport studies shared with consultants working for the NRA	National Roads Authority	
Belcoo Bridge	National Roads Authority	Cavan County Council
A5 and A8 Dual Carriageway projects	National Roads Authority and The Irish Department of Transport	
Footway link at Killea (B193)		Donegal County Council
Information gathering and liaison regarding air crash at Cork Airport	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	

Scheme/Project or Initiative	(a) ROI Gov't Dept or Agency	(b) ROI Non Gov't Agency
There are regular meetings between Donegal County Council and Roads Service officials in relation to road safety issues and future highway upgrades.	National Roads Authority	Donegal County Council

Departmental Procurement

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to procurement by his Department (i) on how many occasions since May 2007 a supplier has been secured through a single tender action in advance of authorisation by the Accounting Officer and the reasons; (ii) the level of expenditure in each case; (iii) the name of each supplier secured through each single tender action; and (iv) the date on which retrospective approval was granted by the Accounting Officer in each case.

(AQW 1154/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In November 2009, my Department, following consultation with the Central Procurement Directorate, issued Procurement Guidelines to all non industrial staff. The Guidelines included a requirement that single tender action (STA) contracts for supplies and services with a value greater than £10,000 be approved by the Accounting Officer (AO). The Accounting Officer authorised two of his deputies, namely the Chief Executive of Roads Service and the Senior Finance Director, to approve STA contracts with a value of £10,000 or below in Roads Service and DRD Core business areas respectively.

In June 2010, the Central Procurement Directorate issued a Procurement Guidance Note which formalised the requirement for AO approval and additionally advised that, in certain instances, contract extensions may be deemed to be STAs.

Prior to November 2009, it was not a requirement within my Department for the Accounting Officer to approve STA contracts, except where the contract was for the procurement of external consultants. Business areas were, however, required to comply with procurement control limits in order to achieve competitiveness and value for money in procurement contracts.

From June 2008, it has been a requirement for all external consultancy STA contracts to be approved by the Accounting Officer.

From the dates when it became a Departmental requirement to obtain Accounting Officer approval for STA contracts (including relevant contract extensions) four contracts, with a total value of £254,000 were awarded without the advance approval of the Accounting Officer.

The table at Annex A provides the requested detail on the following:

- (a) External consultancy contracts awarded by STA from June 2008;
- (b) Contracts awarded by STA from November 2009;
- (c) External consultancy contract extensions deemed to be STAs from June 2010; and
- (d) Contracts extensions deemed to be STA from June 2010.

Single Tender Action Contracts awarded without advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer for:-

- (a) External Consultancy Contracts awarded by STA from June 2008;
 (b) Contracts awarded by STA from November 2009;
 (c) External Consultancy contract extensions (deemed to be STA) from June 2010; and
 (d) Contract extensions (deemed to be STA) from June 2010.

(i) Category of STA and reason for no advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer	(ii) Expenditure £'000	(iii) Supplier Name	(iv) Date of retrospective approval by AO
(a) Transfer of the 2007 E Way version of Belfast Transportation Model to DRD. The STA award was approved in advance of the contract award by the Senior Finance Director. Subsequent monitoring highlighted that the award of the contract required AO approval. Retrospective approval has been received.	3	Atkins Ltd	01/07/2011
(a) Review of NIW procurement processes. Perm Sec commissioned this work personally due to the urgency required, however the formal business case was not signed until after the work had started.	49	Deloitte and G Thompson	10/02/2011
(b) Nil	-	-	-
(c) Critical Friend for the Regional Transportation Strategy Review. The STA arose because of an extension to the above contract. The extension was initially approved by the Director of Finance as it was not initially appreciated that the contract extension was in the category deemed to be a STA contract. Subsequent monitoring highlighted that the award of the contract required AO approval which was subsequently sought and received.	6	Prof. George Hazel of MRC Mclean Hazel	23/03/2011

(i) Category of STA and reason for no advance authorisation by the Accounting Officer	(ii) Expenditure £'000	(iii) Supplier Name	(iv) Date of retrospective approval by AO
(d) Support and Maintenance of Roads Maintenance Client System, Road Traffic Collision System and Street Lighting System This contract extension was required to enable Roads Service to provide continuity of key safety services to the public relating to traffic management and street lighting. Officials had over a number of months been in discussions with CPD regarding the position and recently received confirmation that a Direct Award Contract (DAC) was required for the extension of these services from 2011/12 onwards. These arrangements have now been formalised, however payment was made in advance of formal AO approval due to the threat of legal action by the contractor.	196	Bentley Systems (UK) Ltd	8/07/2011
Total	254		

Unauthorised Commemorations to Terrorists

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of unauthorised commemorations to terrorists which exist on property owned by his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, and (ii) what steps he intends to take to remove them.

(AQW 1303/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's officials have advised that there are 34 commemorations on property owned by my Department, or its arm's length bodies.

My officials are acutely aware of the local and political sensitivities surrounding such commemorations.

Sale of Departmental Land

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to sell land in the North Down area that is owned by his Department.

(AQW 1370/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not collate details of land for sale on a constituency area basis. However, I am able to provide you with details of land declared surplus by my Department in the North Down Borough Council area. This land is currently in the process of being disposed of in accordance with the procedures laid down by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services.

The locations of the surplus lands are listed in the following table:

Location	Town
Area of Land at A2 Dual Carriageway	Hollywood
31a Ashdale Crescent	Bangor
Balloo Road	Bangor
208 Bangor Road	Craigavad
2 Green Lane	Conlig
Hamilton Road	Bangor
Hamilton Road / Park Drive	Bangor
81 High Street	Hollywood
41 Marlo Heights	Bangor
Redburn Square	Hollywood
1a Robinson Road	Bangor
17 Seahill Drive	Hollywood
Old Belfast Road	Bangor

In addition, I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that properties at the following locations in the North Down area, are currently considered surplus to requirements and consequently are deemed suitable for disposal in the future:

Location
Conlig Depot
Seaside Tavern, Hollywood (old pumping station)
Portavo Impounding Reservoir
Conlig Upper Impounding Reservoir
Conlig Lower Impounding Reservoir
Ballysallagh Upper Impounding Reservoir
Ballysallagh Lower Impounding Reservoir
Creightons Green Impounding Reservoir
Whinney Hill Service Reservoir
Ballyminetragh Old Service Reservoir, Groomsport
Church Road Impounding Reservoir, Hollywood

Fuel Costs

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of (i) the additional fuel for Roads Service vehicles that are now based in the Magherafelt depot since the closure of the Cookstown depot, broken down by vehicle type; and (ii) additional staff travel allowance since the closure of the Cookstown depot.

(AQW 1426/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, since the closure of the Cookstown depot on 1 October 2010 until 31 May 2011, the cost of overtime paid to staff at the Magherafelt depot was £46,335.

Roads Service: Overtime

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of overtime paid to Roads Service staff at the Magherafelt depot since the closure of the Cookstown depot.

(AQW 1428/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Member on the cost of additional fuel for Roads Service vehicles now based at Magherafelt depot since the closure of Cookstown depot.

The additional staff travel allowance paid since the closure of Cookstown depot on 1 October 2011 until 31 May 2011 was £3935.

Roads Service: Meetings with the National Housing Building Council

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 773/11-15, to detail (i) the outcome of meetings between Roads Service and the Regional Director of the National Housing-Building Council; and (ii) what action he intends to take in relation to developers who have been unable to complete roads in private housing estates.

(AQW 1431/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the main outcome that emerged from the meeting between officials and the Regional Director of the National Housing-Building Council was an improved mutual understanding of current issues and pressures relating to bonds and the completion of roads in housing developments.

With regard to those developers who have been unable to complete roads in private housing estates, I can advise that my Department will take the appropriate action to have such roads completed, including the use of road bond monies, as appropriate.

Capital Projects: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1443/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service develops its work programmes by Council area rather than on a constituency basis.

I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of the works programme at this time.

Details of capital projects planned by Translink in the North Down constituency, in each of the next three years, are provided in the table below.

Capital Projects In North Down	Financial Year 2011/12	Financial Year 2012/13	Financial Year 2013/14
Bangor Integrated – Refurbishment of Public Toilets	£10,000	0	0
Vegetation Management Programme - Bangor Line	£164,000	0	0
Bangor Bus/Rail Installation of Barriers	£10,000	0	0
Bangor – Improvements to Rear Path and Fencing	£30,000	0	0
Total:	£214,000	0	0

Those projects which will have an impact on the entire Translink network, including North Down, are provided in the table below.

Capital Projects Impacting On North Down	Financial Year 2011/12	Financial Year 2012/13	Financial Year 2013/14
Class 4000 Rolling Stock	£51,907,000	£1,812,000	£73,000
Class 3000 Overhaul	£1,907,000	£1,613,000	£2,779,000
Class 3000 Wi-Fi Equipment	£600,000	0	0
Long Line Public Address Renewal & Expansion Programme	£192,000	£288,000	0
Bridge Examination & Assessment Programme	£263,000	£106,000	0
Embankments & Cuttings	0	£144,000	£251,000
CCTV Programme (NIR)	£49,000	£67,000	£67,000
Building Services Upgrade Programme	£448,000	£1,150,000	£58,000
CCTV Programme (Ulsterbus)	£61,000	£50,000	0
Total:	£5,5427,000	£5,230,000	£3,228,000

My Department will also be investing over these financial years in the purchase of new modern buses, some of which will be deployed in the North Down constituency.

Service 64 Journeys

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of journeys of the Service 64 in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 1468/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have provided me with the following information:

Year	Passenger journeys
2008/2009	2109
2009/2010	2230

Year	Passenger journeys
2010/2011	2307
Total	6646

Removal of Weeds from Pavements

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any changes, in the last 12 months, to the policy on the removal of weeds from pavements.

(AQW 1475/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that there have been no changes to the policy in relation to the removal of weeds from pavements in the last 12 months.

Removal of Weeds from Pavements

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether it is the responsibility of Roads Service to remove weeds from pavements.

(AQW 1477/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that it has no specific statutory obligation to remove weeds, other than in relation to the control of noxious weeds. Roads Service's policy and procedures, in relation to weed control, are aimed at ensuring the safety of road users and to prevent the deterioration of the footway.

Weedkiller Used by Roads Service to Treat Footpaths

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what type of weedkiller is used by Roads Service to treat footpaths.

(AQW 1489/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the majority of weed spraying on footpaths is carried out by external contractors. A general survey of products used by them shows the use of Glyphosate-based weed killers to treat footpaths. Trade names of this product include "Reaper" and "Route One Rosate 36".

Roads Service's direct labour force presently uses a non-selective systemic herbicide that is currently approved for professional use on hard surfaces. The product name is "Frontsweep".

Proposed Bridge for Carlingford Lough

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed bridge for Carlingford Lough.

(AQW 1503/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have assumed that your question refers to the proposal for a bridge at Narrow Water across the Newry River, which flows into Carlingford Lough.

I would advise the Member that the Narrow Water Bridge proposal is being taken forward by Louth County Council and my Department has no direct involvement in this project, nor has it made any commitment to contribute funds to it.

Redevelopment of Culmore Roundabout

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether the increase in traffic flow, the enlargement of traffic lanes and the removal of hedge barriers resulting from the redevelopment of the Culmore Roundabout has caused an increase in noise disruption and invasion

of privacy for residents in the Mount Pleasant area; and what actions his Department is taking to limit this disruption.

(AQW 1527/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, prior to work commencing at Culmore Road Roundabout, it commissioned a non-statutory Environmental Assessment to assess the potential effects of the scheme. This report concluded that there would be no significant increase in noise levels for any of the neighbouring properties attributable to the scheme.

Roads Service does acknowledge that there has been some loss of privacy for some neighbouring properties due to the necessary removal of trees within the road boundary. However, it has already replanted the side slopes with suitable trees and shrubs to help redress this loss. In addition, Roads Service also intends to erect a 1.8 metre high wooden boarded fence, to help provide some privacy to adjacent properties, until the planting has become established.

Flags and Advertisements on Street Light Posts

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 539/11-15, whether Roads Service removed any unauthorised advertising material from lamp posts during May 2011 or June on Main Road, Cloughy.

(AQW 1537/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that officials removed 16 unauthorised advertising signs, including those on lamp posts, from Main Road, Cloughy during June 2011. No such signs were removed during May 2011.

Roads Service's Car Parks

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider the provision of car parking spaces for parents with children in Roads Service's car parks.

(AQW 1552/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it operates off-street car parks under the Off-Street Parking Order NI (2000) and that there are no powers, within the Order, to permit the provision of specific spaces in car parks for parents with children. A legislative change would therefore be necessary to allow such spaces to be provided.

Roads Service considers that to make such a system creditable, it would have to be similar to that currently used for blue badge holders. Given the lack of precedent elsewhere, such a system would be difficult to devise. It would also be expensive both to develop and to run, and it is debateable whether the resultant benefit would justify the resource input required to put it in place. This would be an important factor as without such a system, proper enforcement would be impracticable.

I am further advised that the results of the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) annual 'Baywatch' surveys, indicates that the level of abuse of accessible/disabled bays in private car parks, where there is limited or no control, to be consistently in the region of 20 percent. This would indicate that rigorous enforcement is needed to ensure that such facilities are kept free for those for whom they are intended.

It should be remembered that accessible bays are provided for blue badge holders in recognition of their reduced mobility. These wider parking bays are located in positions closest to the driver's intended destination, not only to enable the driver to use the facility but to also minimise the distance they have to walk. It also has to be taken into account that these people generally do not have any alternative but to park as close to services as is possible. However, parents with children typically do not face the same mobility issues as people with disabilities, and also have the choice to park elsewhere if they feel that the parking space is not suitable.

I would therefore confirm that I have no proposals to provide specific parking spaces for parents with children

Parking Spaces for People with a Disability

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what legislation governs the requirement to provide parking spaces in car parks for people with a disability; (ii) what is the ratio for the required number of parking spaces for people with a disability compared to the size of a car park; and (iii) what is the required minimum size of (a) a car parking space; and (b) a car parking space for people with a disability.

(AQW 1555/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it provides parking bays for disabled persons' vehicles through the powers granted by Article 13 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

Regarding the proportion of parking spaces allocated to people with a disability, I can advise that my Department aims to reserve at least two percent of spaces in its car parks for blue badge holders.

With regard to the size of car parking spaces, I am advised that in general the minimum sizes are:

- (a) 2.0m wide by 4.2m long for general parking provision; and
- (b) 3.6m wide by 4.2m long for accessible bays.

Department for Social Development

Multi-Element Improvement Schemes

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing units which the Housing Executive has listed for Multi-Element Improvement schemes since May 2007; and to list these schemes according to (i) scheduled start date; and (ii) the priority identified by his Department.

(AQW 982/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Multi Element Improvement (MEI) programme has been suspended since 2007/08 when the collapse of the land and property market reduced the housing budget that had been so heavily dependent on capital receipts to fund many programmes such as MEI's. Since then the Housing Executive has been looking at alternative methods of providing improvement works, for example through kitchen replacements. I have also visited the pilot scheme at Rinmore in Londonderry that saw tenants overwhelmingly support a stock transfer proposal that will see 55 unimproved homes transfer from the Housing Executive to a local Housing Association who will inject £2.5m of their own resources into upgrading the homes that had initially been scheduled for MEI.

The attached table outlines the range of MEI schemes that had been scheduled to commence. I understand that the Housing Executive Board plan to consider the specific issue of how best to carry forward improvement works at a meeting later this month.

TABLE: MEI SCHEMES THAT HAD BEEN SCHEDULED TO COMMENCE

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Belfast Area		
Annadale Flats 1	54	19.11.07
Torr Way Bungalows	20	01.03.08
Hazeldene/ Strathroy/ Northwick	33	18.07.08
Northbrook Street	18	01.09.08
Woodvale Phase 10	13	16.10.08

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Cregagh/ Woodstock	28	15.01.09
Suffolk Road Flats	24	16.01.09
Lendrick/ Parker	63	01.04.09
Finaghy Phase 3	46	02.04.09
Annadale Phase 2	48	01.08.09
Roden Street	13	22.09.09
Kinnegar Road, Finaghy	30	04.02.10
Annadale Phase 3	58	01.02.11
Locksley, Finaghy	80	01.02.11
Lower Skegoneill Flats	78	01.04.11
Tigers Bay (Long Terrace)	12	01.06.11
Lenadoon/ Dungloe	24	01.04.13
Garron, Finaghy	80	01.04.20
Greenland/ Boundary Way	23	01.04.20
Annadale Phase 4	42	01.04.20
North East Area		
Sallagh Park, Larne	26	26.01.08
Castlemara Phase 3, Carrickfergus	45	26.01.08
Coleraine Bungalows	53	24.02.08
Antrim Rural Cottages	10	26.02.08
Longfield Gardens, Greenisland	16	19.03.08
Enterprise Parade, Portstewart	49	03.04.08
Rathcoole Phase 5A, Newtownabbey	70	10.04.08
New Mossley Upper, Newtownabbey	63	13.08.08
Dublin Road Phase 2,	62	07.08.08
Ballykeel 2 Phase 1, Ballymena	53	15.08.08
Ballykeel 2 Phase 2, Ballymena	73	15.08.08
Ballee Phase 1, Ballymena	34	15.08.08
Millburn, Coleraine	78	04.09.08
Drumhoy/ Ederny, Carrickfergus	34	15.09.08
Glenarm	17	15.09.08
Ederny Walk 1 beds, Carrickfergus	9	26.09.08
Rushpark Multis, Newtownabbey	112	19.10.08
Kintyre Park/ Shops, Ballymena	7	01.03.09

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Ballygallin, Coleraine	8	17.03.09
Dhu Varren, Portrush	55	01.04.09

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Devenagh Way Flats, Ballymena	18	01.04.09
Townpark North Flats, Antrim	54	03.04.09
Monkscoole House, Newtownabbey	72	04.04.09
Curraghmore/ Glebeview, Garvagh	32	10.04.09
Riverdale Maisonettes, Larne	12	11.04.09
Drumtara Phase 1, Ballymena	53	17.04.09
Drumhoy/ Ederny Flats, Carrickfergus	10	10.06.09
Chichester Park East, Ballymena	24	15.06.09
Wellington Green, Larne	25	15.08.09
Granville Drive, Ballymena	19	07.09.09
Newpark Phase 1, Antrim	75	09.09.09
Whitehead one bed bungalows	47	15.09.09
Drumtara Phase 2, Ballymena	22	01.10.09
Ferris Park Phase 2, Dromore	67	10.10.09
Moat Road, Ballymena	20	04.11.09
Kelburn Park, Newtownabbey	22	02.02.10
Rathcoole Phase 5B, Newtownabbey	33	03.03.10
Loughview Curran Road, Larne	14	04.04.10
Doury Road Phase 2, Ballymena	40	04.04.10
Antrim Rurals	19	15.06.10
Hazelbank, Coleraine	44	10.08.10
Abbotscoole House, Newtownabbey	48	15.08.10
Upper Glebe Maisonettes, Moira	24	15.08.10
Seacourt/ Glenvale, Larne	30	01.09.10
Killane Park, Ahoghill	34	03.09.10
Neillsbrook 2, Antrim	30	15.09.10
Benvore Park, Cargan, Ballymena	8	10.10.10
Kincora/ Shancoole, Ballymena	54	11.11.10
Ballykeel 2 Phase 3, Ballymena	84	05.01.11
Latharna House, Larne	90	20.03.11

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Larne Rural 1 bed bungalows	32	04.04.11
Ballykeel 2 one beds, Ballymena	19	15.04.11
Drumtara Phase 3, Ballymena	55	01.06.11
Caulside/ Newpark, Antrim	38	15.06.11
Doury Road Phase 3, Ballymena	44	15.08.11
Ballykeel 2 Phase 4, Ballymena	62	20.09.11
Carncoole House, Newtownabbey	54	03.10.11
Drumtara Phase 4, Ballymena	24	01.01.12
Toomebridge	35	02.08.13
Monkstown Phase 8	30	11.09.13
Moneydig/ Leardon, Garvagh	12	21.10.14
Thornhill Parade, Ballyclare	0	10.11.14

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
South Area		
Rural Cottages Lurgan	17	31.03.08
Drumlin Drive/ Monbrief, Lurgan	22	31.03.08
Warrenpoint 1 beds	33	08.05.08
Castlehill Park Ballygawley	18	17.06.08
Wellington Street, Lurgan	32	05.09.08
Alexander Estate, Armagh	39	03.09.08
Parkview/ Moody Park, Loughbrickland	22	16.10.08
Clonmeen/ Enniskeen, Brownlow	26	12.12.08
Chestnut Place/ Castleview Banbridge	41	29.12.08
Ackinduff/ Drumreagh	27	19.01.09
Crossmore/ Lir Gardens, Keady	30	21.01.09
Mourne Crescent, Knockmoy, Coalisland	18	05.02.09
Ulsterville Park/ Gardens, Portadown	34	09.02.09
Clanrye/ Raymond Kelly Park, Newry	42	15.04.09
Granville Road/ Princess Way, Portadown	30	17.04.09
South Armagh 1 bed bungalows	44	01.05.09
Avenue Road, Lurgan	37	01.05.09
Hillhead/ Moorefield, Banbridge	41	01.05.09
Mossfield/ Ballymore, Glenane/ Tandragee	64	20.05.09

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Elm Park/ Bellevue Terrace, Richill	19	18.07.09
Drumhillary/ Rural 1 Armagh	29	31.08.09
Mourneview Park Flats, Newry	23	01.09.09
South Down – 1 bed bungalows	48	25.10.09
Culdee Flats, Armagh	44	01.01.10
Newry/ Mullaghbawn 1	50	01.05.10
Cleary Crescent Flats, Newry	42	01.10.10
South East Area		
Jubilee Court, Bangor	35	04.02.08
Hillhall Bungalows, Lisburn	35	04.02.08
Bloomfield Bungalows Phase 2 Ballyree	44	03.03.08
Glenmore Walk Flats, Lisburn	18	17.03.08
West Winds Phase 4A, Newtownards	37	17.03.08
Moyle Walk/ Kilwarlin, Lisburn	32	17.03.08
Kilcooley 1A, Bangor	24	24.03.08
Victoria Bungalows, Newtownards	10	24.03.08
Kilcooley 1B Bungalows, Bangor	20	01.04.08
Bloomfield Bungalows Phase 3, Bangor	27	01.04.08
West Winds Phase 5, Newtownards	24	01.04.08
Rathgill Zone 5, Bangor	16	08.04.08
West Winds Phase 4B, Newtownards	22	01.09.08
Craig Garden Bungalows, Lisburn	8	08.09.08

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Tonagh Phase 3, Lisburn	40	14.09.08
Belvoir Bedsit Flats, Castlereagh	34	01.10.08
Glen Bungalows, Newtownards	16	10.08.09
West Winds Phase 6, Newtownards	66	01.09.09
West Winds Phase 7, Newtownards	46	01.09.10
Castlereagh Rurals	3	01.04.11
Kilcooley Zone 1, Bangor	54	01.04.11
Hillhall Park, Lisburn	24	03.08.11
West Area		
Main Street/ 39 Alexander Pk, Magherafelt	4	11.02.08

Scheme Name/Location	No. of Dwellings	Start Date
Castleberg/ Sion Mills	40	03.03.08
High Park, Derry	16	31.03.08
Sperrin Road/ Rathbeg, Limavady	50	07.04.08
Benbradagh Avenue/ Event, Limavady	59	07.04.08
Balbane/ Linsfort, Creggan, Derry	55	01.09.08
Beechwood Crescent/ Eastway, Creggan	40	06.04.09
Central Drive/ Dunree, Creggan, Derry	36	06.04.09
Melmore Gardens, Creggan, Derry	22	07.09.09
Benevenagh Drive/ Grange, Limavady	53	07.09.09
Columbia Park/ Church Street, Limavady	30	05.10.09
Cookstown Flats/ Bungalows	33	30.01.10
Magherafelt Flats/ Bungalows	32	05.04.10
Omagh Flats/ Bungalows	35	04.04.11
Ext 53 Parkview, Pomeroy	1	07.05.12

Housing Renovation Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to list in order of priority the major renovation schemes planned for housing estates over the next twelve months.

(AQW 1124/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed that there are no major renovation schemes planned for housing estates over the next twelve months due to a reduction in capital funding. However, the table below details the heating, kitchen and external cyclical maintenance schemes in their programme for 2011/12 by start date.

TABLE: HEATING, KITCHEN AND EXTERNAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE SCHEMES IN THE PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Belfast		
1st Tranche 2011/12*		
Belfast One-Offs - Heating	100	01/04/11
Erskine St/Chamberlain St - Heating	64	30/05/11
Summerhill/Ardcarn – External Cyclical Maintenance	153	21/06/11
2nd Tranche 2011/12*		
Glencairn - Windows & Insulation	150	06/06/11

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Albertbridge Road/Tower Street – External Cyclical Maintenance	188	27/06/11
Bruslee/Pinkerton - Kitchens	135	27/06/11
White City Phase 2 - Windows	225	01/08/11
Huss/Ashmore, Belfast - Kitchens	77	01/08/11
3rd Tranche 2011/12*		
Highfield - Windows	203	27/06/11
Suffolk - Windows	216	01/08/11
East Belfast - Economy 7	41	01/08/11
Mid Springfield - Kitchens	99	01/09/11
Greencastle Close - Heating	26	01/10/11
South Belfast - Economy 7	47	01/10/11
North Belfast - Economy 7	51	01/10/11
Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh - Kitchens	56	01/10/11
St Leonards Street - Kitchens	68	01/11/11
Carnet House - Windows	71	01/02/12
4th Tranche 2011/2012*		
West Belfast - Economy 7	38	01/09/11
Shankill Belfast - Economy 7	105	01/09/11
Reserve 2011/12***		
Shankill & South Thermal Comfort to include heating & insulation	55	01/06/11
West Belfast Thermal Comfort to include heating & insulation	25	01/06/11
North Belfast Thermal Comfort to include heating & insulation	49	01/06/11
Roden Street Area (West) Part 1 - Kitchens	102	01/11/11
Lower Ormeau - Windows	130	01/01/12
Queen Victoria Garden Flats – External Cyclical Maintenance	36	01/02/12
The Village Improvement to Kitchens Ph 1	120	01/02/12
Mid Shankill Phase 1 (Part 1) - Kitchens	71	01/02/12
Lower Ormeau – Improvement of acquired stock	101	01/02/12
Silverstream/Ballysillan – Kitchens	196	01/02/12
Village Area - Window Ph 1	120	01/03/12
Lower Beersbridge/Mount - Windows	270	01/03/12

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Rinalea/Lower Lenadoon – External Cyclical Maintenance	224	01/03/12
Lower Shankill Phase 1 – Kitchens	145	01/03/12
The Village Improvement Area Phase 2	119	01/03/12
Island Street – Kitchens	37	01/03/12
Tyndale/Silverstream – Kitchens	184	01/03/12
Springmadden/Ballymurphy - Kitchens	40	01/03/12
North East		
1st Tranche 2011/12*		
Springfarm/Stiles – Heating	44	04/04/11
Area One Off Heating Scheme 2011/12	55	04/04/11
West Rathcoole Ph 1 - Kitchens	94	04/04/11
Dervock,Clintyfinnan,Rasharkin – External Cyclical Maintenance	388	16/05/11
Newtownabbey 2 - Heating	129	20/06/11
New Mossley Upper - Kitchens	54	20/06/11
2nd Tranche 2011/12*		
Cushendall/Cushendun – Heating	37	15/06/11
Milburn – Heating	76	25/07/11
1A-F Grange Drive, Ballyclare - Heating	5	30/07/11
Ballee – External Cyclical Maintenance	363	02/08/11
Monkstown/Kelburn – Kitchens	91	07/08/11
Carrickfergus - External Cyclical Maintenance	162	15/08/11
Lantarra/Lettercreeve – Heating	101	25/09/11
Glenarm/Carnlough - Windows/Painting	94	24/10/11
Killane Pk/Chichester East - Kitchens	121	03/01/12
Antrim Town - External Cyclical Maintenance	357	06/01/12
3rd Tranche 2011/12*		
Harpurs Hill - Heating	47	05/09/11
Ballintoy/Liscolman - External Cyclical Maintenance	18	15/09/11
Ballyclare/Doagh - Heating	92	04/10/11
Toome/Coolsythe - Kitchens	75	06/10/11
Glenarm/Sallagh - Kitchens	68	15/10/11
Carnanny - Heating	66	07/11/11

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Balintoy/Liscolman - Windows/ Painting	18	02/03/12
4th Tranche 2011/12*		
Dublin Road/Townparks - Heating	108	05/01/12
Retrofit Schemes 2011/12**		
Ferris Park - Heating	62	23/05/11
Longfield/Carrick Town - Heating	68	13/06/11
Ballymena Town - Heating	182	11/11/11
Reserve 2011/12***		
Ballysally Area 1 Ph2 – Kitchens	128	01/01/12
Ballymena South – Heating	79	09/01/12
Monkscoole House - Windows	71	30/01/12
Rathcoole Zone - - External Cyclical Maintenance	99	01/02/12
Ballymena North – Heating	87	04/02/12
Glebeside Ph1 (Paint/Repairs)	168	05/02/12
Castlemara/Longfield/Ederney - Kitchens	79	07/02/12
Springfarm Ph3 - Kitchens	123	07/02/12
Abbotscoole House - Windows	57	20/02/12
Ballykeel 2 Ph1 - Kitchens	87	03/03/12
Carncoole House - Windows	57	30/03/12
South		
1st Tranche 2011/12*		
Gather Up 11 – One off heating schemes	50	04/04/11
Armagh Road Newry - Kitchens	103	02/05/11
Redmanville – Heating	112	27/06/11
Drumgullion/Meadows/Violet Hill – External Cyclical Maintenance	371	08/08/11
2nd Tranche 2011/12*		
Armagh District - Windows	85	20/06/11
Cornagrade - Kitchens	105	01/08/11
Enniskeen - Kitchens	115	23/08/11
Hospital Estate - External Cyclical Maintenance	192	19/09/11
3rd Tranche 2011/12*		

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Lawrencetown/Loughbrickland - External Cyclical Maintenance	245	19/09/11
Annaghmore/Keady/Armagh - Kitchens	75	19/09/11
Irvinestown/Lisbellaw - Kitchens	96	23/09/11
Corcraun - Heating	97	25/09/11
Dobbins Grove/Killuney/Lisanal - Heating	66	03/10/11
Lisnahull/Milltown/Carland Rd - External Cyclical Maintenance	303	24/10/11
Hillview/Kilmacormick - Heating	45	14/11/11
4th Tranche 2011/12*		
Callan St/Drumarg – Heating	101	01/01/12
Dungannon/Donaghmore - Heating	115	04/01/12
Gilford/Scarva/Loughbrickland - Heating	51	20/01/12
Retrofit Schemes 2011/12**		
Kenlis/Mountview/Meganlis - Heating	42	17/10/11
Reserve 2011/12***		
Brownstown/Clounagh - External Cyclical Maintenance	209	07/11/11
Carrowshee/Hudson Heights - External Cyclical Maintenance	116	21/11/11
Newry - Windows	94	26/11/11
Banbridge - Windows	137	12/12/11
Drumbawn/Derrin Pk/Ferney - External Cyclical Maintenance	219	02/01/12
Springdale/Fairfield - Kitchens	107	16/01/12
Cornagrade - Heating	94	30/01/12
Longstone/Markethill/Richhill - Kitchens	76	01/02/12
Coalisland - External Cyclical Maintenance	190	06/02/12
Avenue Road/ Bleary - Kitchens	71	20/02/12
South East		
1st Tranche 2011/12*		
South East Area One Off Heating	30	01/04/11
Rushmore/Knockburn – External Cyclical Maintenance	132	04/04/11
Crawfordsburn/Groomsport/Lisnabreen - Heating	80	04/04/11

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Castlerobin,Belvoir - External Cyclical Maintenance	331	11/04/11
Scrabo – Kitchens	161	11/04/11
Hollywood - Room heaters/Open Fire	101	04/07/11
148a-158a Longstone St. - Kitchens/Heating	6	25/07/11
Belvoir - Kitchens	29	02/08/11
2nd Tranche 2011/12*		
Milltown Ave – Kitchens	86	01/07/11
Local Area Priority Lisburn - Windows/Insulation	296	01/08/11
Milltown Derriaghy & Areema - Heating	84	01/11/11
Tullycarnet - Room heater Replacement	54	07/11/11
3rd Tranche 2011/12*		
Doon Pk,Carryduff/N'ewtownbreda - Kitchens (86/9/90)	80	01/08/11
Local Area Priority Glenbawn Estate - Windows/Insulation	193	05/09/11
Hilden/Low Road - Kitchens Ph 1	86	01/11/11
Portaferry/Portavogie/Kircubbin - Kitchens	105	01/12/11
Low Road – Heating & Insulation	80	01/03/12
Comber - Heating	27	25/03/12
4th Tranche 2011/12*		
Coronation Pk/Moatview/Banff - Heating	59	02/01/12
Portaferryferry/Portavogie/Cotton - Heating	81	20/03/12
Retrofit Schemes 2011/12**		
Ballynahinch – Heating & Insulation	66	02/08/11
Belvoir/Grays Pk/Carryduff - Room heater	27	05/09/11
Millisle - Room heaters	31	02/01/12
Ballywalter/Kircubbin - Heating	95	09/01/12
Reserve 2011/12***		
Killyleagh/Crossgar – Heating & Insulation	113	05/09/11
Greenwood/Moira - Kitchens	47	05/09/11
Bangor Dist - Windows/Insulation	285	01/11/11
Castlereagh District - Windows/Insulation	271	01/01/12
Glen Estate Roofs Spec Revenue	120	03/01/12

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Cappagh Gdns Flats – External Cyclical Maintenance	48	03/01/12
Downpatrick District - Windows/Insulation	369	01/02/12
Ballybeen Enler/Kilberry/Kilmuir - External Cyclical Maintenance	60	01/02/12
Ardkeel/Ballybeg/Mourne	55	01/02/12
Glen/Comber - Windows/Insulation	316	01/03/12
Ardcaoin - Kitchens	119	01/03/12
Churchill/Groomsport/Redburn - Kitchens	99	05/03/12
Burrendale - Kitchens	93	10/03/12
Bowtown – Heating & Insulation	109	15/03/12
Downpatrick/Strangford - Heating	91	31/03/12
West		
1st Tranche 2011 12*		
Emergency One off heating Scheme 2011/12	40	01/04/11
Glenfada - Remainder of Electric Heating	34	04/04/11
Cashelhill/Brookdale Cr – Remainder of Electric heating	27	04/04/11
Sandy Braes/Hunters - Windows	89	09/05/11
Sunnyside/Park View - Remainder of Electric Heating	13	09/05/11
Brown Dr/Edmund Ct/O'Hara Rd - Kitchens	76	23/05/11
Beechway - Heating	29	13/06/11
Glenvale Rd,Glenbank Rd,Glenside - Heating	112	15/08/11
2nd Tranche 2011/12*		
Virginia/Campion/Mimosa Court - Kitchens	117	30/05/11
The Fountain – Electric Heating	33	20/06/11
Ardnabrocky/Gobnascale/Primity - Heating	113	04/07/11
Beechway/Ratheen Ave – External Cyclical Maintenance	211	18/08/11
Castleberg/Sion - Windows	56	22/08/11
Coolessan/Woodland - External Cyclical Maintenance	104	05/09/11
3rd Tranche 2011/12*		
Lilac Av/Ballyboigh/Rushie Park - Heating	49	03/10/11
Drumleck Drive /Gardens - Kitchens	129	17/10/11

Scheme name	Number of dwellings	Start Date
Earhart/Amelia/Capall Ct - Heating	89	07/11/11
Meadow/Denamona/Duncan - External Cyclical Maintenance	118	05/12/11
Beechwood/Dunaff/Central Drive - External Cyclical Maintenance	70	05/12/11
Retrofit Schemes 2011/12**		
Culmore/Duncan/Denamona – Heating & Insulation	66	14/11/11
Crawfordsburn/Mcmasters Crescent - Heating	67	05/12/11
Reserve 2011/12***		
Alexander Rd/Church St/Connell St, Limavady - External Cyclical Maintenance	109	12/12/11
Blackhill/Riverside Drive - Windows	55	12/12/11
Westway/Iniscarn - Windows	117	12/12/11
Altcar Park - External Cyclical Maintenance	71	12/12/11
Glebe Gdns/Glebe Ulster Sion - Kitchens	58	12/12/11
Greystone Pk/Anderson – Kitchens	60	12/12/11
Bishop Street Kitchens - Kitchens	138	12/12/11

* Tranche = a means of splitting the programme over the year so that contractors have an even workload against available funding

** Retrofit Scheme = Heating & Insulation

*** Reserve = reserve scheme if another scheme slips

Pensioners: Policies

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all the policies that have been implemented by his Department since 2007 which specifically help pensioners.

(AQW 1362/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I attach great importance to the role older people play in society and am pleased that my Department has been to the fore in improving the lives of our pensioners. Since 2007 the following policies across the wide spectrum of my Department's responsibilities have been implemented which help current and future pensioners:

Social Security

- a reduction in the number of qualifying years needed to get a full basic State Pension to 30 and the abolition of the 25% de minimis rule below which pension was not payable;
- the introduction of a single contribution condition for entitlement to a basic State Pension;
- introduction of credits for parents, carers and certain wider family members which count for State Pension purposes;
- the removal of the requirement for a spouse to have to wait for her husband to claim his pension before claiming one based on his contributions;

- rights to a State Pension based on their partner's contribution record extended to married men, widowers, civil partners and surviving civil partners;
- uprating of the basic State Pension by the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%;
- uprating of the guarantee credit in State Pension Credit by earnings;
- simplification of the additional State Pension;
- temporary increase in the Winter Fuel Payment for years 2008/09 and 2009/10;
- permanent increase in Cold Weather Payments from £8.50 to £25;
- temporary increase in the Christmas Bonus from £10 to £70 for the winter 2008;
- removal of the requirement for certain people to make a claim for State Pension where the Department already holds sufficient information to make a decision on entitlement;
- introduction of a part-week payment to pensioners who experience a gap in payments when moving from a working age benefit to State Pension or Pension Credit;
- extension of the Assessed Income Period in Pension Credit for people aged 75 or over which reduces the duty to provide information on an annual basis;
- introduction of graduated retirement benefit inheritance rights for widowers and surviving civil partners;
- credits awarded to people entitled to Employment and Support Allowance will count towards entitlement to State Second Pension;
- increase in awards of basic State Pension for eligible people reaching State Pension age between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2015 who chose to pay up to 6 years voluntary National Insurance contributions to improve their national insurance record;
- since 6 October 2008 Pension Credit customers retain their entitlement for up to 13 weeks whilst on a temporary absence from Northern Ireland;
- from 5 January 2009 the capital limit on which eligible mortgage interest can be paid to Pension Credit customers increased to £200,000 where the person had previously been in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance and claims Pension Credit within 12 weeks of entitlement to that benefit ending;
- in November 2009 the capital threshold in Pension Credit increased from £6,000 to £10,000.

Private Pensions

automatic enrolment of eligible employees into a low-cost workplace pension scheme on a phased basis from 2012. This will result in more people saving for their own retirement and boost pensioner incomes in the future;

sharing of Pension Protection Fund compensation on divorce or dissolution of a civil partnership

Fuel Poverty

- In April 2009 the Household Fuel Payment of £150 was paid to householders who were in receipt of pension credit.
- The Boiler Replacement Scheme was launched in June 2011 and is aimed at owner occupiers or private tenants who:
 - are aged 60 years or over; and
 - receive a state pension with rates relief; and
 - have an older (at least 15 years old), inefficient boiler.

Neighbourhood Renewal

The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is the Executive's main programme for addressing spatial deprivation. It aims to bring together the work of all Government Departments in partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in all aspects of everyday life.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund has been used to support a range of projects/groups that support elderly people within Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. Examples of services supported include:

- Meals on Wheels
- Transport Service
- Care of Older People Service
- Advice and Information Service
- Community Safety Initiative
- Community Allotment Project
- Older People North West
- Good Morning projects
- North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum
- Over 50s club
- Podiatry services
- Training programmes for the over 50s
- Safe and Well Older Peoples project and
- Health and Well-Being projects.

While the Social Security Agency has not introduced any specific policies for pensioners, it has introduced services aimed at improving access to benefits and increasing uptake.

In 2007 the Agency began a programme of transformation around the processing of State Pension and State Pension Credit aimed at reducing the time spent making and processing claims for these benefits. Its purpose also included the provision of support for pensioners through the process so helping reduce errors and aiding the compilation of relevant information.

Through a new approach using telephony, times for processing claims have reduced from 20 days to 8 for State Pension and from 15 days to 11 for State Pension Credit. It has also meant that pensioners can now make their State Pension claims through a supported 10 minute telephone conversation rather than completing a 10 page form. In terms of State Pension Credit this has resulted in pensioners having a choice between a 20 minute telephone call and a 15 page form.

95% of the 12,000 State Pension claims and 75% of State Pension Credit's 11,500 claims received every year are now handled by telephone.

Revised processes to increase the uptake of Housing Benefit were implemented as part of the changes introduced by the Pensions Transformation Programme. Since November 2008, State Pension Credit staff use an electronic script to identify potential Housing Benefit entitlement. When making a claim to State Pension Credit customers can also claim Housing Benefit. Staff take the information over the phone, populate the Housing Benefit form and forward it to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and/or Land and Property Services without the need for a customer signature. This new approach promotes Housing Benefit uptake among pensioners, reduces processing times for Housing Benefit applications and simplifies the system for both customers and staff.

In February of this year the Agency introduced the State Pension On-Line service which gives pensioners the option of completing their State Pension claims via the internet.

The Agency delivers an annual Benefit Uptake Programme designed specifically to target people who may not be claiming their full benefit entitlement. This area remains one of Agency's key priorities. To date the Programmes have consisted of a targeted exercise where customers are selected by cross-matching data on the Agency's benefit systems and then offered a benefit assessment carried out by a contracted third party provider. In 2009 the targeted exercises were supplemented with an Outreach strand, which circulated leaflets and posters to groups not typically associated with social security benefits that are attended by older people.

The 2011/2012 Programme will continue with the targeted exercises, involving 25,000 people, the majority of whom will be older people. The Outreach Strand of the Programme will also continue to raise awareness of potential entitlement among older people in the remaining 10 council areas not covered in the previous 2 years campaigns. There are an estimated 130,000 older people in these areas.

In addition the Agency will pursue an advertising campaign to raise awareness of benefits for older people and an Innovation Fund (worth £250,000) will be initiated to explore new ways to increase the uptake of social security benefits.

Since 2005 a total of 90,000 invitations have been issued to older people offering a benefit assessment through the Advice Sector and 250,000 mail shots have been sent out to raise awareness of State Pension Credit. By 2011 these exercises had generated an additional £27.1m of annual benefit and arrears to people over 60.

Heating Conversion Programme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to provide funding to the Housing Executive for a future Heating Conversion Programme, given the success of similar programmes in previous years.

(AQW 1380/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised me that the total funding in 2011/12 for new schemes for both the Thermal Comfort Programme and planned maintenance Heating Replacement Programme is £16,852,000. This does not include any allowance for prior year commitments for which there is a separate budget and also does not include any adaptation heating costs.

Disability Living Allowance: Review

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been subject to the routine review of Disability Living Allowance cases, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 1424/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of people in each constituency who have been subject to a routine review of Disability Living Allowance in each year between April 2007 and March 2011. Figures broken down by constituency prior to 2007 are not available. The total number of routine reviews carried since this process started in 1999 to the end of June 2011 is 34,348 which includes the figures in the table below.

Constituency	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast East	200	267	176	145
Belfast North	307	442	274	212
Belfast South	176	228	164	176
Belfast West	372	476	299	315
East Antrim	152	223	134	101
East Londonderry	156	270	165	135

Constituency	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	172	252	192	155
Foyle	304	419	276	254
Lagan Valley	160	264	140	147
Mid Ulster	203	265	179	136
Newry And Armagh	236	335	228	210
North Antrim	211	243	145	130
North Down	129	181	139	125
South Antrim	151	243	159	127
South Down	248	307	213	210
Strangford	162	259	153	152
Upper Bann	243	357	234	214
West Tyrone	241	350	221	205
Unallocated Postcode*	25	32	21	27
Total	3,848	5,413	3,512	3,176

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to a Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a constituency using this method and some cannot be allocated at all.

Disability Living Allowance: People in Receipt of

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 1425/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below. The figures show the number of claims where Disability Living Allowance was in payment at the date of extract. The date of extract was 11 June 2011.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS BY CONSTITUENCY

Constituency	Numbers of Recipients
Belfast East	8,864
Belfast North	14,751
Belfast South	8,279
Belfast West	17,400
East Antrim	7,247
East Londonderry	8,307
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	9,170

Constituency	Numbers of Recipients
Foyle	13,638
Lagan Valley	7,740
Mid Ulster	10,164
Newry And Armagh	12,076
North Antrim	8,400
North Down	6,188
South Antrim	7,920
South Down	10,979
Strangford	7,414
Upper Bann	12,713
West Tyrone	12,762
Unallocated	1,780
Total	185,792

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to a constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

North Down: Capital Projects

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what capital projects are planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three years.

(AQW 1437/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Detailed below are the capital projects planned for the North Down constituency in each of the next three financial years, subject to funding being available and the necessary approvals.

2012/13 None

2013/14 A Public Realm Scheme for Bangor Town Centre will commence in 2013

Housing Executive Environmental Schemes are planned for:

- Clanmorris
- Lisnabreen
- Rathgill zone 6
- Rathgill zone 4 & 5
- Breezemount
- Bloomfield
- Clandeboye Road
- Kilcooley zone 3

2014/15 The Bangor Town Centre Public Realm Scheme will continue into 2014/15

Town Centre Regeneration: Initiatives

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the town centre regeneration initiatives which have been identified to receive funding in this financial year.

(AQW 1457/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Initiatives within the umbrella of town centre regeneration identified to receive funding in this financial year from DSD's Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group include Comprehensive Development schemes, Urban Development Grants, Public Realm schemes and other capital and capital grant programmes. Projects are currently being taken forward in Belfast, Londonderry and a number of regional towns with other projects in the pipeline at appraisal and planning stage. Town centre regeneration funding is also provided for the maintenance of DSD property held for regeneration purposes, promotion and marketing of towns and city centres and costs of Ilex Urban Regeneration Company.

Town Centre Regeneration: Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding will be allocated to town centre regeneration in each year of this mandate.

(AQW 1458/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The figures requested are as follows:

TABLE 1 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FUNDING 2011/12 TO 2014/15

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Amount (k)	£19,301	£36,144	£28,729	£23,659

Figures include expenditure on Comprehensive Development Schemes, Urban Development Grants, Public Realm, Fort George Improvements, United Kingdom City of Culture, Promotions, Maintenance, and Ilex Regeneration Company.

The figures shown for years 2012/13 to 2014/15 reflect the total budget for each of the above programmes which includes funding for activities other than town centre regeneration in the wider urban area. Each year funding for town centre regeneration will be allocated from the total budget according to priorities however it is not possible, at this point in time, to determine figures for funding specifically relating to Town Centre Regeneration over this period.

Disability Living Allowance: Non-Attendance at Appeal Tribunals

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Disability Living Allowance appeal tribunals in each of the last five years were not attended by the appellant.

(AQW 1484/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below outlines the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeal tribunals not attended by an appellant from June 2007 to March 2011. The figures include both oral and paper-based appeals. In the case of the latter, the appellant has requested that the appeal be determined in their absence; the Tribunal will determine the appeal using evidence papers only.

Information on the number of Disability Living Allowance appeal tribunals not attended by an appellant prior to June 2007 is not readily available.

DLA APPEAL HEARINGS NOT ATTENDED BY APPELLANT

June 2007- March 2008	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
2428	3622	3418	3087

Disability Living Allowance: Adjournment of Appeal Tribunals

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Disability Living Allowance appeal tribunals in each of the last five years have been adjourned because the relevant medical records were unavailable.

(AQW 1485/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Where the appellant has provided their consent, the Appeals Service will request General Practitioner records for Disability Living Allowance appeals. The table below outlines the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeal tribunals adjourned because General Practitioner records were unavailable at the hearing in each of the last five years.

DLA Appeal Hearings Adjourned Due To Unavailability of GP Notes

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
542	808	1123	848	754

Ballymena: Housing Executive Properties

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development when Housing Executive properties in Ballymena, which have been boarded up for more than six months, will be available for occupation.

(AQW 1490/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that boarded up properties in Ballymena are located in pockets of low demand. However, the Housing Executive works in partnership with the local community to try to identify prospective tenants prior to ordering costly repairs. Once a tenant is identified who is prepared to accept the tenancy, the property will generally be available for occupation within four to six weeks.

However, it is my priority to address the issue of empty homes including boarded up properties in both the private and social sectors throughout Northern Ireland. My Department is currently awaiting the Housing Executive's action plan to address the issue of empty homes in Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive Stock

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to make any of the current Housing Executive stock available for purchase by tenants.

(AQW 1491/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has had a house sales scheme in operation since 1979 and over 100,000 eligible tenants have purchased their Housing Executive home. The current House Sales Scheme provides sitting Housing Executive tenants with a minimum of five years tenancy in the public sector the right to purchase their home. Under the Scheme any dwelling may be sold except the following:-

- Sheltered dwelling units
- Any single storey or ground floor dwelling, other than a flat, with two bedrooms except in the following circumstances:-
 - i) Where the relevant tenancy commenced between 1 November 2000 and 31 August 2002 and the tenant or a member of their household was at least aged 60 at the Commencement of Tenancy date.
 - ii) Where the relevant tenancy commenced prior to 31 August 2002 and
- The current tenant and members of their household were under the age of 60 at the Commencement of Tenancy date.
- The tenancy resulted from a compulsory transfer from another Housing Executive property where the tenant had the right to buy.

Disability Living Allowance: Medical Conditions

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what medical conditions automatically qualify a person for receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 1492/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Entitlement to disability living allowance depends on the effects that severe disability has on a person's life and not on a particular disability or diagnosis. This ensures that severely disabled people have equal access to the benefit irrespective of the cause of their disabilities. Entitlement is based on the extent of a disabled person's need for personal care and their ability to walk. However, there are special provisions for people with certain specific conditions and impairments leading to awards of particular rates of disability living allowance. These provisions apply to people who are terminally ill, both deaf and blind, double amputee, severely mentally impaired, severely visually impaired or undergoing haemodialysis.

Housing Executive Properties: Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to reduce anti-social behaviour in Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 1505/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has issued guidance to the Housing Executive on dealing with anti-social behaviour in its properties and on publishing its policies and procedures for dealing with such behaviour. My Department also supports the Housing Executive through the introduction of new legislation where necessary. Section 12 of the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which comes into operation on 1 September 2011 will allow the Housing Executive to withhold consent to tenancy exchanges where any of the parties have been involved in anti-social behaviour. Section 13 of the Act, which also comes into operation on 1 September, will allow any person to disclose information to the Housing Executive for the purposes of enabling it to take action to deal with anti-social behaviour. Section 14, which came into operation on 30 June 2011, requires the courts, when considering an application for an order for possession on grounds relating to anti-social behaviour, to take account of all relevant circumstances, including the impact of the anti-social behaviour on the tenant's neighbours.

The Housing Executive has carried out a number of policy reviews including the review of the neighbourhood warden service, the development and introduction of a Community Safety Communication Plan and the introduction of tenant led inspections of Anti Social Behaviour Services. The Housing Executive has also built on the success of community based partnership working with Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) and Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI). Both organisations now undertake mediation case referrals and community support work. CRJI are delivering such services in the Greater West Belfast area with NIA delivering in the Greater Shankill/ Ballysillan areas, North Down and Rathcoole.

In November 2010 the Housing Executive hosted an inter agency restorative justice seminar to consider the future use and funding of a community based restorative justice scheme. The seminar was attended by representatives from all the main statutory agencies working in the field of community safety and chaired by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate. A steering group was established in December 2010 to take forward the main themes discussed and agreed at the November seminar. This steering group is now in the process of drafting proposals to support an inter agency model for the future funding of restorative justice practices.

Preventative measures to address anti-social behaviour continue to be used widely, with over 70% of all such complaints being resolved through the use of visits, interviews and warning letters. The use of mediation as a means of resolving anti-social behaviour rose significantly this year with 248 cases actioned through meditative interventions. The Housing Executive will continue to promote an early interventionist approach to resolving anti-social behaviour and thus ensure that legal action to repossess properties remains the last resort which will only be used when all other remedies have been tested or deemed as inappropriate.

Foreign Nationals: Registered as Unemployed and in Receipt of Benefits

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many foreign nationals are currently registered as unemployed and are in receipt of benefits; and how this figure compares to five years ago.

(AQW 1554/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as the Department for Work and Pensions Information Technology systems which are used in Northern Ireland do not record a claimants nationality as the requirement to be of a particular nationality is not a condition of benefit entitlement.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Consultants

Mr McNarry asked the Assembly Commission what steps it has taken to reduce the use of consultants.

(AQO 241/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): In line with all other entities funded from the Northern Ireland Block, the Assembly Commission has recently agreed its budget for the next four years as part of the Budget 2011-15 exercise. The nature of the Assembly Commission's business does not lend itself to the large-scale use of consultants apart from the specific circumstances where appropriate skills are not otherwise available. In this regard, the Assembly Commission would generally seek to utilise the Parliamentary skills and knowledge held in other legislatures before seeking to engage external consultants.

The Commission will maintain this approach over the Comprehensive Spending Review period and takes a conservative stance to the use of consultants, requiring officials to consult with the Commission before entering into a consultant contract greater than £50,000.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ulster-Scots Academy

In Bound Volume 37, page WA218, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4547/09) asked by Mr Butler with:

Ms C Ní Chuilín: My Department made funding available as follows in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 financial years:

(1) **Ulster-Scots Academy:**

2006-2007

£392,412

2007-2008

£405,189

(ii) **Ulster-Scots projects**

Through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's funding programmes (Annual Support for Organisations Programme, Lottery, Awards for All, Arts Development Fund, and Support for Individual Artists Programme) funding has been made available as follows:

2006-2007

£65,739

2007-2008

£37,240

In addition, the Ulster-Scots Agency has received a budgetary allocation of £2.557m for the calendar year 2007 and £3.315m for the calendar year 2008. In accordance with its statutory remit, the Agency supports funding through its Financial Assistance Scheme to organisations and groups involved in projects, festivals and events relating to Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language.

North West 200

In this Bound Volume, page WA153, replace the answer to the question (AQO 216/11-15) asked by Mr Dunne with:

Ms C Ní Chuilín: The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has responsibility for the management of the NI Tourism Events Fund, with the aim of encouraging new and supporting the development of existing events which deliver the objectives of the draft NI Tourism Strategy.

Departmental Schemes, Projects or Initiatives

In this Bound Volume, page WA139, replace the answer to the question (AQW 906/11-15) asked by Mr Lyttle with:

Ms C Ní Chuilín: My Department together with the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht jointly sponsors the North South Language Body (Foras na Gaeilge and Ulster-Scots Agency) and Waterways Ireland.

A table detailing the other schemes, projects and initiatives that my Department, and its associated Arms Length Bodies, receive (and are receiving) co-operation from Government Departments, agencies and non-governmental organisations in the South of Ireland is attached at Annex 1.

ANNEX 1

Title of DCAL/Associated ALB Scheme/ Project/Initiative	Department/Agency/ NGO * in South of Ireland	Date
National Museums NI - Treasures from the North: Irish Paintings from the Ulster Museum 1700-1960	National Gallery of Ireland	2007
Arts Council NI - Books Ireland Ltd/Books Review Ireland Ltd	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007
Sport NI - Rally Ireland	Failte Ireland	Nov 2007
NI Screen - Cinemobile	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon Irish Film Board RTE	Every year since its inception in 2000 until 31st March 2011
Arts Council NI – Irish Pages	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2011
Arts Council NI – Tyrone Guthrie Centre	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2011
Arts Council NI – Irish Traditional Music Archive	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2011
Arts Council NI – Poetry Ireland	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2011
Arts Council NI – Camerata Ireland	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2008 2010 - 2011
Arts Council NI – National Chamber Choir	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2008
Arts Council NI – Visual Artists Ireland	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2008
Arts Council NI – Opera Theatre Company	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2009
Arts Council NI – Contemporary Music Centre	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2009
Arts Council NI – Photoworks North/Source Magazine	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2007 - 2010
Museum Awards	Heritage Council	2007, 2009 & 2011
Arts Council NI – Circa Art Magazine	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2008 - 2011
Arts Council NI – Kid's Own Publishing	The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon	2008
Sport NI - Rally Ireland	Failte Ireland	Jan 2009
Examination of museum sector training needs and sector standards	Heritage Council	2010 & 2011

Title of DCAL/Associated ALB Scheme/ Project/Initiative	Department/Agency/ NGO * in South of Ireland	Date
National Museums NI - 'Experience Northern Ireland: Titanic and More' exhibition in New York	Tourism Ireland	24-29 Sept 2010
Libraries NI - "Kids Own Travelling Library"	Sligo Library Services	Sept 2010
National Museums NI - Iarnród Éireann donated a Diesel locomotive	Iarnród Éireann	May 2011
National Museums NI – sharing of collections/ loans and meetings on matters of shared interest	Museums in the South of Ireland	Ongoing
National Museums NI - exhibiting on Tourism Ireland stands at exhibitions, facilitating press and tour operator familiarisation visits	Tourism Ireland	Ongoing
National Museums NI - Ulster American Folk Park Learning programmes	Schools in the South of Ireland	Ongoing
Cross border mobile library serving rural areas on the Donegal/Derry border	Donegal Library Service	Ongoing
Libraries NI – Partnership & sharing of expertise	Dublin City Libraries	Ongoing
Libraries NI – The Irish Joint Fiction Reserve	Library Services in South of Ireland	Ongoing
Music PAL scheme	14 public, 9 higher education, 3 conservatoire and 7 special libraries throughout the island of Ireland	Ongoing
Sport NI - Anti Doping Education initiatives	Irish Sports Council	Ongoing
Sport NI - North West Coaching and Club Development Project	Coaching Ireland	Ongoing
Sport NI - All Ireland high performance plans for 6 governing bodies	Irish Sports Council & Irish Institute of Sport	Ongoing
Sport NI - Development of the SNI Coaching Plan	Coaching Ireland	Ongoing

* NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

Education

Assaults on Pupils

In this Bound Volume, page WA302, replace the answer to the question (AQW 1423/11-15) asked by Mr Lunn with:

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not collect information about assaults on pupils by pupils or by members of school staff.

Statistics on the reasons for suspensions and expulsions of pupils are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below shows the number of occasions in each of the last four school years where the main reason for a suspension or expulsion has been classified by the school as a physical attack on another pupil:-

	Primary Pupils		Post-primary Pupils	
	Number of suspensions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of expulsions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of suspensions for physical attack on a pupil	Number of expulsions for physical attack on a pupil
2006/07	83	0	1,624	8
2007/08	100	0	1,545	5
2008/09	83	0	1,511	6
2009/10	105	0	1,495	5

Notes

- 1 These figures relate to all pupils undertaking Key Stage 1-4 in primary and post-primary schools. The figures exclude pupils in special schools and education other than at school.
- 2 The information reflects the number of individual suspensions, as opposed to the number of pupils suspended. Pupils may be suspended more than once.

First Minister and deputy First Minister

Funding for Victims' Groups

In this Bound Volume, page WA1, replace the answer to the question (AQW 44/11-15) asked by Mr I McCrea with:

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are writing to correct an error contained in our answer of 21 June to AQW 44/11-15.

It has come to our attention that the figures we provided you with were incorrect for two of the years. Please accept our apologies for this error.

The table below details the funding for victims' groups over the past 5 years.

Year	OFMDFM Funding (£)	OFMDFM Interim Capacity Fund * (£)
2006/07	2,986,638	N/A
2007/08	2,791,080	N/A

Year	OFMDFM Funding (£)	OFMDFM Interim Capacity Fund * (£)
2008/09	3,857,189	954,684
2009/10	4,557,800	576,481
2010/11	6,283,847	154,625

* In April 2008, OFMDFM introduced additional support for victims and survivors groups in the form of an Interim Capacity Fund. The purpose of this fund was to allow groups to continue important projects that had begun under PEACE II while the application process to PEACE III was taken forward.

Justice

Prisoner Assessment Unit

In Bound Volume 64, page WA246, replace the answer to the question (AQW 648/11-15) asked by Lord Morrow with:

Mr Ford: Staff first raised concerns following two unconnected incidents which took place on 7 and 17 of April which involved, respectively, a breach of prison rules and a breach of the Prisoner Assessment Unit's internal protocols by several prisoners accommodated there. The prisoners involved in these incidents were subsequently returned to Maghaberry Prison.

A third incident, again involving a breach the internal protocols of the Prisoner Assessment Unit, took place on Sunday 18 April and was brought to the attention of Maghaberry Senior Management on 21 April. Following this, a decision was taken immediately to temporarily close the Unit to facilitate a thorough review and investigation into each of the incidents.

Independent Members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnership

In this Bound Volume, page WA244, replace the answer to the question (AQW 855/11-15) asked by Mr Weir with:

Mr Ford: The Justice Act, passed by the Assembly in May 2011, included a measure to pay expenses only, and not allowances, to independent members of the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs).

Not paying allowances to members of the PCSPs will protect the amount of funding that can be directed towards front line projects which can make a real difference on the ground. This was my main intention in recommending this course of action.

I am keen that members are not out of pocket as a result of their contribution to PCSPs, and they will be able to claim expenses.

I am extremely grateful to all members of the current District Policing Partnerships, and in particular those who have suffered cowardly attacks and intimidation, for their strength of purpose, courage of conviction and determination to serve. However, allowances were not intended to compensate for any risks to the personal safety of DPP members that may have arisen during their service and I do not intend to reinstate them for the new PCSPs.

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 20 June 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 **Rory McIlroy: US Open Champion**

Mr Peter Weir made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to Rory McIlroy: US Open Champion. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 **Motion - Suspension of Standing Orders**

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 20 June 2011.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

3.2 **Statement - Public Expenditure: 2010 - 11 Provisional Outturn and 2011 - 12 June Monitoring Round**

The Minister for Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement to the Assembly regarding Public Expenditure: 2010 - 11 Provisional Outturn and 2011 - 12 June Monitoring Round, following which he replied to questions.

3.3 **Second Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15)**

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Second Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended at 2.30pm.

4. Question Time

4.1 **Agriculture and Rural Development**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Second Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Second Stage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 1).

6. Committee Membership

6.1 Motion - Appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides for a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards; and delegates to the Assembly Commission those functions referred to in section 19(4) of that Act in relation to the appointment of the Commissioner.

Mr P Weir

Mr B McElduff

Mr L Cree

Mr P Ramsey

Mrs J Cochrane

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 Motion - Reduction of Coastguard Services

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with grave concern HM Government's proposal to reduce the number of coastguard centres throughout the United Kingdom and, in particular, the threat to Bregenz House in Bangor, which if closed would leave Northern Ireland without effective coastal protection; and calls on HM Government to revise its proposals to ensure the retention of Bregenz House.

Mr P Weir

Mr W Humphrey

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7.2 Motion - Mortgage Relief Scheme

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to implement a mortgage relief scheme to help those people who are experiencing difficulties in paying their mortgages and are at risk of losing their homes.

Mr F McCann

Mr A Maskey

Mr M Brady

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 9.34pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

20 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Second Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15)

Minister for Finance and Personnel

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 39

Noes: 8

Ayes

Nationalist

Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Flanagan, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr O'Dowd.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr T Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Other

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle.

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

Noes

Nationalist

Mr Durkan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist

Mr Allister.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: *Mr Agnew and Mr Allister.*

Total votes	47	Total Ayes	39	[83.0%]
Nationalist Votes	16	Nationalist Ayes	10	[62.5%]
Unionist Votes	26	Unionist Ayes	25	[96.2%]
Other Votes	5	Other Ayes	4	[80.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Hussey, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Swann.

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 15 - 20 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Postal Services Act 2011

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Disposal of Documents Schedule for the Compensation Agency (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/216 The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/226 The Child Support and Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games (DCAL)

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Fifth and Sixth Reports from the Public Accounts Committee Session 2010-2011 - Measuring the Performance of NI Water and Procurement and Governance in NI Water (DFP)

Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Fourth and Eighth Reports from the Public Accounts Committee Session 2010-2011 - Arrangements for Ensuring the Quality of Care Homes for Older People and Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy (DFP)

Pathways to Success - Establishing an initial broad strategic direction and supporting cross-Departmental actions to reduce the number of young people most at risk of remaining outside education, employment or training (NEET) (DEL)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 21 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Attack on the Short Strand Area

Mr Alex Maskey made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Attack on the Short Strand Area. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - North-South Ministerial Council: Plenary Format

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement to the Assembly regarding the North-South Ministerial Council: Plenary format meeting, held on 10 June 2011, following which he replied to questions.

4. Speaker's Business

4.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker informed the House that Royal Assent had been signified on 21 June 2011 to the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Statement - Inter-governmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement to the Assembly regarding the Inter-governmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which he replied to questions.

5.2 Consideration Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1-11-15).

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 1 to 9 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Schedules 1 to 5 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was agreed without division.

Bill (NIA 1/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker.

6. Committee Business

6.1 Motion - The Agency Workers Directive

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the EU Directive on conditions for temporary agency workers (Directive 2008/104/EC); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure, in implementing the Directive, that both the needs of workers and minimising the costs to business are taken into account.

Chairperson, Committee for Employment and Learning

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.44pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

7. Question Time

7.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

7.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

8. Committee Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion - The Agency Workers Directive (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

9. Adjournment

Mr Tom Elliott spoke to his topic on Justice for Colin Worton.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.49pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

21 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 21 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/229 The Rules of the Court of Judicature (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.3) 2011 (DOJ)
 - S.R. 2011/230 The Crown Court (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
 - S.R. 2011/231 The Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)For Information Only:
 - S.R. 2011/218 The Road Races (Eagles Rock Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2011/219 The Road Races (Benbradagh Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2011/225 The Magistrates' Courts (Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements Act 1982) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
Welfare Reform Bill (transfer of tax credits and data-sharing) - Legislative Consent Memorandum (DSD)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 21 June 2011

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11			

2011-2015 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 27 June 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 The Police Ombudsman's Report on the Loughinisland Killings

Ms Caitriona Ruane made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Police Ombudsman's Report on the Loughinisland Killings. Constituency representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

2.2 Historical Enquiries Team Report on the Kingsmills Massacre

Mr Danny Kennedy made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Historical Enquiries Team Report on the Kingsmills Massacre. Constituency representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Extension of Sitting on Monday 27 June 2011 under SO 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 27 June 2011 be extended to no later than 9.00pm.

Mr R Swann

Mr P Weir

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Further Consideration Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Bill NIA 1/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.2 Final Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved that the Final Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Final Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Final Stage.

NIA Bill 1/11-15 passed Final Stage with cross-community support (Division 1).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6.2 Legislative Consent Motion - Finance (No.3) Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that the UK Parliament should consider amendments to the Finance (No. 3) Bill to extend to Northern Ireland the provisions dealing with mutual assistance for the recovery of taxes etc.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.3 Motion - Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.4 Legislative Consent Motion - Protection of Freedoms Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Protection of Freedoms Bill dealing with the Disclosure and Barring Service contained in Chapter 3 of Part 5 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Bill as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Committee Business

7.1 Motion - Higher Education Tuition Fees

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that funding is available to maintain the excellence of Northern Ireland's higher education system and is consistent with our aim of maximising educational opportunities for all.

Chairperson, Committee for Employment and Learning

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.28pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

27 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

27 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Final Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15)

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 65

Noes: 15

Ayes

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr F McCann and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist

Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist

Mr Allister.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Agnew and Mr Allister.

Total votes	80	Total Ayes	65	[81.3%]
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Nationalist Votes	37	Nationalist Ayes	24	[64.9%]
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Unionist Votes	35	Unionist Ayes	34	[97.1%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	7	[87.5%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result.

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

The Final Stage was **passed** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 22 - 27 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10 (DCAL)

Ofqual Annual Report 2010/2011 (DEL)

Chief Local Government Auditor's Code of Audit Practice 2011 (DOE)

Business Services Organisation Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)

Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation: Annual Report for 2010/11 (DETI)

Forest Service Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DARD)

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)

Inspection of the Use of Legal Services by the Criminal Justice System (CJINI)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

▪ S.R. 2011/223 Marketing of Potatoes (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)

▪ S.R. 2011/228 The Local Government (Contracts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)

▪ S.R. 2011/236 The Plastic Kitchenware (Conditions on Imports from China) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

▪ S.R. 2011/220 The Road Races (Craigantlet Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

▪ S.R. 2011/221 The Road Races (Armoy Motorcycle Race) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on the Potential for Extending the Natural Gas Network in Northern Ireland (DETI)

9. Departmental Publications

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Business Plan 2011/12 (DOJ)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 28 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Outcome of British-Irish Council Summit

The First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson, made a statement to the Assembly, regarding the outcome of the British-Irish Council Summit meeting, held on 20 June 2011, following which he replied to questions.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker

The Speaker advised that the procedure for nomination of a Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker would be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5A.

Ms Jennifer McCann nominated Mr Francie Molloy to act as Principal Deputy Speaker. Mr Molloy indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, that Mr Molloy be Principal Deputy Speaker, the Nomination was approved with cross-community support (Division 1).

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Legislative Consent Motion - Welfare Reform Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in clauses 122 and 123 of the Welfare Reform Bill, as amended at Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with the transfer of tax credit functions and the supply of information by a Northern Ireland Department, or by a person providing services to a Northern Ireland Department, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion - Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme

Proposed:

That the following Members are appointed as the Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme: Mr John Dallat, Mr Ross Hussey, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Mickey Brady and Mr Jim Wells.

Mr P Weir

Mr B McElduff

Mr L Cree

Mr P Ramsey

Mrs J Cochrane

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - Devolution of Corporation Tax Powers

Proposed:

That this Assembly supports, in principle, the case for the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and looks forward to the outcome of the HM Treasury consultation on 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy', the provision of further information on the associated costs and benefits, and the development of more detailed proposals for implementing and exercising the powers.

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 1.48pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

6.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

6.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

7. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

7.1 Erroneous Release of Prisoner from HMP Maghaberry

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, replied to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Mr Paul Givan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

8. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Statement - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Dental Inquiry and other issues

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement to the Assembly regarding the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Dental Inquiry and other issues, following which he replied to questions.

9. Committee Business (Cont'd)

9.1 Motion - Caesarean Section Rates

The following Motion stood on the Order Paper in the name of the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place measures to reduce the high rate of caesarean sections, given the risks to both mother and child, as well as the cost to the Health Service.

The Motion was not moved.

10. Adjournment

Mr Barry McElduff spoke to his topic on the Abandonment of the Jobs and Benefits Project in Strabane.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.09pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

28 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

28 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Question put, That Mr Francie Molloy act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 50

Noes: 33

Ayes

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Irwin, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr W Clarke and Ms Ruane.

Noes

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mr Swann.

Total votes	83	Total Ayes	50	[60.2%%]
Nationalist Votes	37	Nationalist Ayes	23	[62.2%]
Unionist Votes	39	Unionist Ayes	27	[69.2%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result:

Mr S Agnew.

The Nomination was **approved** by cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 28 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Northern Ireland Ombudsman Annual Report 2010/2011 (OFMDFM)

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)

Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report and Accounts for the period 1 April 2010 - 31 March 2011 (DOJ)

Rivers Agency Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DARD)

Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DE)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/242 The Road Traffic Fixed Penalties (Enforcement of Fines) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/243 The Family Proceedings (Amendment No.2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/244 The Divorce and Dissolution etc. (Pension Protection Fund) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Rating of Commercial Properties: small businesses, large retail properties and empty shops (DFP)

Consultation on Draft High Hedges Fee Legislation (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 27 June 2011

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11	27.06.11	27.06.11	

2011-2015 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage